

Concessions workers for San Francisco Giants baseball team vote overwhelmingly to strike over COVID-19 safety

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Hundreds of concessions workers for the San Francisco Giants baseball team voted Saturday for strike action against unsafe working conditions by an overwhelming 96.7 percent, after workers have fallen ill with COVID-19 since the baseball season began in April. However, the UNITE HERE union is seeking to prevent a struggle against the risks which workers face from crowds of often maskless and inebriated spectators. Instead, it forced its workers to remain on the job for Sunday's baseball game against the Los Angeles Dodgers while attempting to negotiate a meager \$3 hourly "hazard pay" raise.

The San Francisco Giants management's contempt toward the safety of its employees and customers is summed up in its safety website's prominent banner, reading "NO COVID-19 ENTRY REQUIREMENTS." The page then paradoxically says that masks are required in indoor areas of the stadium and "encouraged" in outdoor areas, which workers report is largely unenforced.

The consensus among medical experts is that the highly-infectious Delta variant can spread effectively even in crowded outdoor settings. As many as 1,000 people were infected at the Verknipt outdoor music festival in the Dutch city of Utrecht, which, unlike Giants games, required a negative COVID-19 test for entry.

Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to kill over 1,200 people per day in the United States, with over 666,000 total officially recorded deaths, eclipsing the deaths in US Civil War, the country's deadliest conflict. California continues to see over 100 deaths per day, as the Delta variant continues to spread through the population, vaccinated and unvaccinated alike.

Concessions workers have been working at the stadium since the baseball season began in April 2021. Although California law AB685 requires that workers be notified in writing within one business day of any "potential exposure to COVID-19," the first written notice was delivered only in August, after four months of baseball games, according to 48 Hills. Workers were then informed of 21 confirmed COVID-19 cases in April (1), July (11), and August (7 cases through August 12). This delay in reporting is a clear violation of both basic public health considerations and California law.

Giants concessions workers are employed by Bon Appetit Management, a food service contractor for the Giants. Their base pay, which has not increased since 2018, is \$20.75 per hour, which would amount to roughly \$3,500 per month with a 40-hour work week. However, given the fact that major league teams play 81 home games in a six-month season, each of which lasts roughly three hours, their real take home pay is significantly less. As with most service workers in San Francisco, workers have no choice but to commute long distances, sometimes hours in each direction. Workers must work 10 events per month to qualify for health benefits, but some upcoming months have only nine events scheduled, raising the prospect that workers could lose health benefits.

Giants concessions workers are rightly outraged by the conditions they are facing. However, the UNITE HERE union offers them no way forward. Union local president Anand Singh made this clear when he stated "[T]he overall approach adopted by the Giants to keep both workers and fans safe during this latest surge is completely inadequate, and dangerously irresponsible.

Our members have carried on through this pandemic without fair compensation and security in our health insurance, while the powers that be have continued to reap profits.”

If the current operation of Giants baseball games is “dangerously irresponsible,” and it certainly is, this only demonstrates the union’s own role in exposing workers to infection, particularly after forcing its members to work the Sunday game after the strike vote.

What’s more, the union is not even demanding safe working conditions for concessions workers. Instead, they are simply demanding a miserly \$3 per hour “hazard pay” wage increase, after workers have gone without raises for three years in one of the most expensive cities in the world. In other words, UNITE HERE fully accepts the “right” of the \$3.2 billion San Francisco Giants baseball franchise to infect its workers and customers with COVID-19, as long as it pays a premium.

Across the country and internationally, the unions have been instrumental in forcing workers back into unsafe workplaces, from meatpacking plants to auto factories to classrooms.

Even absent a pandemic, Giants concession workers certainly deserve a raise far in excess of \$3 per hour. However, the fundamental question facing these workers, as well as the entire working class, is the basic right to their own safety. During a pandemic transmitted through respiratory aerosols, baseball stadiums should not be open at all. The only way to finally eradicate the coronavirus once and for all is by closing down stadiums as well as other non-essential workplaces as part of a comprehensive public health strategy to end community transmission. Workers impacted by shutdowns must be fully compensated with their normal wages.

Workers should not need to choose between serving hot dogs and pretzels at a substantial risk to their own lives and starving. The question is not an extra few dollars in hazard pay, but the closure of baseball games, with full pay to concessions workers, until the community transmission of COVID-19 is eliminated through a scientifically-guided lockdown with mass testing and contact tracing.

The fight by Giants concessions workers against unsafe working conditions brings them into direct conflict with the trade union apparatus, which works

hand in hand with management and accepts the premise that workers must become sick and die to make money for multi-billion-dollar corporations.

Giants concessions workers must follow the example of autoworkers at Dana and Volvo and form rank-and-file safety committees, independent of and in opposition to the unions and the Democrats and Republicans, to fight for their own demands, which should include a strike to shut down Giants games and other mass spectator sporting events, with full compensation for all stadium workers.

Workers who agree with this perspective should contact the *World Socialist Web Site*.



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