

Hundreds of hospitality workers in Hollywood, Florida prevented from striking after Unite Here announces sellout agreement

Alex Johnson
15 September 2022

Four hundred fifty hospitality workers at the Diplomat Beach Resort conglomerate in Hollywood, Florida, were prevented from striking early Monday morning after union officials of Unite Here Local 355 announced an agreement that contains wage increases far below the surging costs of living in South Florida.

A collective bargaining agreement that had been in place for five years expired on June 30 and a two-month extension for the contract expired last month. The three-year agreement reached Monday, however, only raises wages from \$13.95 an hour to \$17.00 and then to \$20 by 2025, still far from adequate to provide a living wage.

The vote earlier this month resulted in 99 percent in favor of a strike after negotiations between the union and Diplomat failed. Workers' overwhelming determination to strike is fueled by the high cost of living in South Florida, one of the most expensive regions in the nation, and stagnant wages that remain far below inflation. The opposition among highly exploited hotel workers also reflects broader anger in the working class that is surfacing in a wave of strikes in opposition to massive cuts to workers' living standards due to inflation.

The agreement reached between Unite Here and Brookfield Asset Management, the owner of the hotel, was officially declared on the union's Twitter page. It noted that a strike this week was "narrowly prevented" when the union reached an agreement to raise the hourly wage to \$20 and prevent subcontracting additional workers at lower wages. According to Unite Here secretary-treasurer Wendi Walsh, the new agreement spelled an "incredible victory" for hospitality workers.

The outcome was already foreshadowed in an interview Walsh held with WLRN Radio earlier this week, saying that the wages for workers wouldn't "have to get there all at once" and they could arrive at the desired amount "at end of the contract."

Moreover, the agreement does not address the hotel's horrendously low staffing levels, another important grievance of workers, especially those in housekeeping. After Diplomat Beach reopened in June 2021, hotel management reduced its staff by almost a third from 650 to 450. One Diplomat Banquet Server told the *Miami New Times*, "the hotel did nothing for the workers."

The lack of adequate staffing has impacted housekeeping services. Hotel management is demanding that housekeepers clean rooms upon customer checkouts, which has led to incredible exhaustion and strain for hospitality workers while the pressure from understaffing also raises the risk of injuries and bodily harm.

Another matter left entirely unaddressed in the agreement is the massive reduction in workers' hours. Workers are reporting that they have seen their hours plummet from 40 to 50 hours a week to 15 or 20, and are reeling from substantial losses in income.

Diplomat Beach Resort is one of the largest and more profitable hotels in Florida and the largest in Broward County, raking in an estimated \$40 million in revenue each year. In contrast to the millions the company has piled up following the reopening of the hotel, Housekeepers, restaurant staffers and other non-tipped workers were getting paid measly sums.

Despite the enormous opposition among hospitality workers to fight against low wages and horrible

conditions, the union has sought to isolate its various locals and prevent any unified action by its 7,000 airport, restaurant, and casino workers. In an effort to derail workers' determination to fight, Unite Here officials extended the bargaining agreement past the June 30 deadline for another two months to work out a sell-out contract behind workers' backs.

The tactics of Local 355 mirror the role the union played during a series of strikes in the fall of 2018 among Unite Here workers in Boston and Chicago against the world's largest hotel chain, Marriott International. After keeping workers in the dark for weeks as to the content and direction of negotiations, the union abruptly ended strikes that erupted in dozens of Marriott hotels and rammed through piecemeal deals that did not meet workers' demands for higher wages or year-round health insurance.

The refusal of the unions to conduct a genuine struggle against low wages and layoffs arises from their role as industrial policeman for the ruling class and capitalist parties, who see the unions as indispensable in suppressing the class struggle. Unite Here's alliance with the Democratic Party and hotel chain management corresponds to the class position of the bureaucracy, staffed with executives like President Donald Taylor who makes \$271,324 a year. The union controls assets worth over \$186 million. However, this money is used to fund the salaries and perks of union officials, not support strikes by workers battling poverty wages.

The health crisis caused by the pandemic and spiraling costs of living is fueling a rebellion against these corrupt organizations. Minnesota nurses overwhelmingly supported the call for strike action as 15,000 nurses and hospital staff began a strike this week against inadequate pay, overwhelming workloads and safety hazards. Two weeks ago, Michigan Medicine nurses voted overwhelmingly to authorize an unfair labor practices (ULP) strike, which the nurses' unions are seeking to curtail.

Hospitality workers in South Florida must link their struggles with workers across industries both nationally and internationally in a fight to build their own independent organizations, rank-and-file committees controlled by workers and not union bureaucrats. This is central to the campaign of Will Lehman, a worker at the Mack Trucks assembly plant in Pennsylvania, who is a candidate for UAW president. Will has called for

the formation of a "a mass movement of the rank and file to break the dictatorship of the UAW apparatus and bring power to the shop floor."

At the heart of Will's campaign is the fight to build rank-and-file committees to organize workers themselves in the auto industry as an independent power to prepare a fight against the giant companies, awash with profits, and the corporatist trade union apparatus.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact