

Fearing expanded strike action, Unite Here shuts down Southern California hotel workers strike

Our reporters
5 July 2023

On Wednesday morning, Unite Here Local 11 shut down a three-day strike by 15,000 hotel workers in Southern California. The strike included front desk staff, cleaning and maintenance staff and others at 19 different hotels throughout the Los Angeles and Orange County areas. Eighteen hotels resumed work Wednesday morning while a 19th, the Fairmont Miramar, briefly locked out the striking workers.

Workers at 60 different hotel locations have voted in favor of strike action, but the union restricted the three-day action to less than a third of these.

Hotel workers make poverty-level wages in one of the most expensive areas of the country. While the union has publicly called for a \$5 per hour wage during the first year of the next contract and \$3 per hour in the subsequent years, they shut down the strike before even these modest increases could have been achieved. Peter Hillan, spokesperson for the Hotel Association of Los Angeles, was elated by the end of the strike. “If indeed it’s [the strike being called off] true, then great. Come on back to the bargaining table,” he told the press Wednesday morning.

The strike intersected with a growing explosion of strikes throughout the West Coast which was doubtless a significant contributing factor in the bureaucracy’s calling off the strike. The striking hotel workers had been joined on the picket line by striking Hollywood screenwriters along with UPS drivers who voted by 97 percent to strike against the commerce giant late last month. One UPS driver who joined the hotel workers’ picket expressed to the *Los Angeles Times* a growing desire to link up workers’ struggles. “It’s a labor movement that is happening nationwide, so it’s important for us to stick together and fight.”

This growing movement is international in scope, and includes strikes in Canada by 7,400 West Coast dockworkers and 1,400 National Steel Car workers, as well as a two-day national schools strike in England.

Under these conditions, the union bureaucracies, including Unite Here Local 11, are doing everything in their power to either prevent strikes or to limit them and quickly shut them down. Last Wednesday, several days before the hotel workers’ strike even began, Unite Here reached an agreement with the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in downtown Los Angeles, preemptively stopping 600 workers from joining their brothers and sisters on the picket line.

To add insult to injury, the union absurdly justified the shutdown of the strike by claiming that this would allow for other hotel workers to strike. Maria Hernandez, spokeswoman for Unite Here, claimed that the strike stoppage was part of a “wave” of walkouts needed “to make room for [workers at] other hotels who have also authorized a strike to walk out.”

“They felt inspired by what the [striking workers] did and they are more energized,” she said. “Any of those properties across the region could get ready to go out themselves really soon at any moment.” But if hotel workers had already voted overwhelmingly to strike from the outset, why would they need such additional inspiration to join the picket line?

In fact, through this action of so-called waves of strikes and isolated agreements with the hotels, the union is effectively making their members scab on one another during the course of their struggle. “At this point, the Bonaventure led the way,” Hernandez said, defending the decision to sign a separate deal at the hotel. “Other will just have to sign that deal. If the

Bonaventure can do it, others can too.” The WSWS has requested details of that contract from Local 11 spokeswoman Hernandez, but has yet to receive a response.

Speaking to the *World Socialist Web Site*, one hotel worker noted: “We’re sacrificing here for the greater good, which is just a decent standard of living. [Being able to afford] things, heavy inflation, everything went up 10, 20 percent, and we’re out of a contract, and they don’t want to pay. And, you know, here we are a day before our country’s birthday, fighting for our rights again, fighting for equity again.

“I lived in New York for 17 years. I’ve been here about 5 years. Los Angeles is even more expensive. You need a car and car insurance to get around. It’s a horizontal city. And that puts more of a strain, more of a burden on working families that just want what’s right, that just want what’s fair.”

“New York City Federation of Teachers just decided to sign a contract after a year of being out and they can’t go on strike, so we have to do it for them. We’re at this precipice here in our world, at this time between haves and have-nots. It’s becoming this weird new feudal state where the largest hoteliers in the world here are not allowing people to just have a fair shake at life. You know, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And this has been coming for decades. It’s been coming for decades.”

Asked about the need for solidarity with immigrant workers, who represent an enormous contingent of the hotel workforce, the worker continued: “On immigrant coworkers, I can sympathize. And every one of the stories out here is different. But how much more of a risk is that to take for somebody who’s an immigrant? For an immigrant, for somebody who’s fighting even harder against more obstacles? How much more of a risk is that to take?”

The worker continued: “As the billionaires hold out, they’re throwing a wrench into the economy. And that’s really sad. It’s really sad because how much more do they need? How high are they going to build the walls to keep us out? Those that would work for them, those that work in all the positions for them, making their companies run, whether it’s dock workers, whether it’s hotel workers, whether it’s UPS workers, whether it’s writers, whether it’s directors, actors, whether it’s people that work up at the theme

park that in a month their time is up for the contract.

“As it pertains to broadening the strike to other sections of the working class, to have a larger effect on the economy, to create more leverage when it comes to political effects and representation, I totally agree. I don’t know how that’s done, but there’s a lot of really good people, passionate people that work here that really love taking care of their fellow man.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact