

Over 50 Culinary Union workers arrested after blocking Las Vegas strip

Hong Jian

31 October 2023

One month after over 40,000 members of the Culinary Workers Union voted to authorize a strike at major Las Vegas strip casinos, the union has yet to announce a strike deadline.

Hotel, casino, restaurant and bar workers in ‘Sin City’ voted overwhelmingly to strike a week after their contract expired last month, which followed months of behind-closed-doors ‘negotiations’ that began in April.

Instead of setting a strike deadline, on October 25, the union, which purports to represent 60,000 hospitality workers in Las Vegas and Reno, Nevada, and is an affiliate of Unite-Here, staged a stunt rally on the Las Vegas strip during afternoon rush-hour. During the rally, 75 members of the union sat down in the middle of the road blocking traffic until they were escorted away by police.

Las Vegas police confirmed to the Associated Press that 58 people were cited for “assembling to disturb the peace,” a misdemeanor. The union said they would pay the fines of every worker, which can be up to \$1,000 each. It is unclear what input rank-and-file workers had in deciding to carry out this stunt, that could cost the union up to \$58,000, or more than three times the average annual \$18,686 base salary of a server in the Culinary Workers Union, per Salary.com.

After the ‘sit-in’, well-paid lead culinary union negotiator Ted Pappageorge said that, “I think that if workers show they’re willing to do whatever it takes including nonviolent civil disobedience, willing to get arrested and fight for their contract and fight for their families. We think that’s something that the public will support and they have in the past.”

While there is enormous support among the broader working class, including Detroit-area casino workers for a joint strike, the union is doing everything it can to keep workers on the job, producing profits, while trying to force through a rotten deal. In order to cover for their sordid maneuverings, the Culinary Workers Union is engaged in publicity stunts that get workers arrested and do nothing to impair the profits of some of the largest resort chains in the world.

Pappageorge, who is the former president of the culinary union and is its current secretary-treasurer, stated after the Wednesday rally, “We want to avoid a strike, but these workers are ready to strike if necessary,” and stated that without further movement, there could be a strike as early as next week. However, as Friday came and went without progress, no strike deadline had been set.

The Culinary Workers Union has been carrying out separate negotiations with each of the three major resort chains on the strip, representing some 22 properties, including MGM Resorts International, Caesars Entertainment, and Wynn/Encore.

Pappageorge said that while the union was aware that casino workers were on strike in Detroit and supported them “100 percent,” the topic of coordinated joint strike action in both cities has not even been broached.

This is of a piece with the ongoing strike actions by Unite Here in Los Angeles over the last few months. In addition to conducting “rolling strikes” which allow the hotels to remain open, there has been absolutely no linking of the struggle of Los Angeles hospitality workers with those in Las Vegas. This again exposes the role of the modern trade unions as labor police that divide workers, not link them in struggle against their common exploiters.

Similarly, the UAW has refused to unite the struggle of Big Three autoworkers with that of Mack Trucks workers, those at General Dynamics, and casino workers in Detroit who are also in the UAW. In all these struggles, the union tops work to keep workers divided, isolated, and uninformed.

The current negotiating campaign was launched under the moniker, “One job should be enough”—a slogan which reveals much more about the previous contracts negotiated by the union than they would like to admit.

Earlier this month, the union released a report titled “The Human Cost of High Hotel Profits: A survey of Las Vegas guest room attendants,” in which they documented that:

- 99 percent said check-out rooms take longer to clean.
- 95 percent said their employer did not provide a reduction in their daily work quota due to excessive travel between floors and towers as they push heavy carts.
- 88 percent reported having pain or discomfort while working.
- 77 percent said they have been directly asked by a guest to clean their rooms, but had to decline because they have not been assigned by the company to do so.
- 67 percent reported that management did not provide adequate cleaning supplies and equipment.
- 57 percent have been seen by a doctor for work-related pain or injury.
- 43 percent said they have missed family time or events due to mandatory overtime.

These conditions, including pay raises that don’t total \$5 over the course of 20 years for many workers, are the direct result of all the prior contract betrayals negotiated by the Culinary Workers Union, all of which have been characterized as “historic.”

In the case of the last contract the union recommended, the union claimed it had achieved a “greater measure of security for members including workplace safety, sexual harassment, subcontracting, technology, and immigration. In addition, the Union’s economic proposal that was won will provide workers a fair share of the employers’ enormous anticipated cash flows and Trump tax windfalls.”

In fact, this was all lies and empty bluster. In order to

win the raises and protections they need to survive in the face of record-high inflation, which will only intensify as the wars continue in Ukraine, Gaza, and soon with China, casino workers have to take the initiative and take the leadership of this contract fight out of the hands of the bureaucrats.

This can be done by forming democratically-controlled rank-and-file committees that are independent of the bureaucracy and the two parties of big business. These committees will fight to unite workers, within the union and across professions and artificial boundaries, in order to carry out the necessary joint struggle.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact