

Strike deadline set for 35,000 Las Vegas, Nevada casino workers

Hong Jian, Jacob Crosse
6 November 2023

Last Friday, the Culinary Workers Union Local 226 announced a strike deadline of November 10 for 60,000 casino workers in Las Vegas and the wider state of Nevada.

The strike deadline affects some 35,000 workers at 18 casino properties on the Las Vegas strip. Hospitality workers have been working without a contract for nearly two months, after previously voting in September overwhelmingly to strike.

In a statement issued this past Friday, the union said that if a tentative agreement was not reached by 5 a.m. on November 10, workers would begin their strike.

Ted Pappageorge, secretary-treasurer, lead negotiator and former president of the Culinary Workers Union, said that the setting of a strike deadline was meant to send a strong message to the companies. “We’re united and the companies cannot function without these workers.”

But workers should not take anything Pappageorge and other well-paid union bureaucrats say at face value. The Culinary Workers Union, a member of Unite-Here, has been engaged in separate negotiations with MGM Resorts International, Caesars Entertainment, and Wynn/Encore—three of the largest resort chains in the world—since April.

These negotiations have taken place behind closed-doors and behind the back of the membership. After months of radio silence, in recent weeks the union has started claiming that there has been “progress,” but they have not specified exactly what this alleged progress is.

As of this writing, the Culinary Union has yet to even publicly state their specific demands, knowing full well if workers knew the pittance they were “negotiating” for, they would revolt.

Thousands of workers voted at the end of September to authorize a strike, yet the union is just now setting a strike deadline. Even the strike authorization vote in September wasn’t called until 10 days after all the extensions on the contract had expired. In other words, workers have now been on the job for almost two months without a contract, leaving them open to harassment and victimization.

The delay in setting a strike deadline is no accident. The last thing Pappageorge and the union bureaucracy wants to do is actually have workers go out on strike. The last time the union actually called a major strike was in 1990, over three decades

ago.

The union announced the setting of a strike deadline after the latest reports emerged showing that the casinos, once again, have been raking in record revenues. According to the Nevada Gaming Control Board, this past September marked the 31st straight month in which the state’s casinos have collected at least \$1 billion in revenues.

Pappageorge himself admitted in a recent interview, “No worker is willing to be shortchanged in this economy that Las Vegas is enjoying right now, companies are making record profits.”

Last Tuesday, Caesars Entertainment announced that its third quarter revenue was \$3 billion, a rise of 3.7 percent from a year earlier. In Nevada as a whole, the state’s non-restricted gaming licensees reported \$1.27 billion in revenue for September, an increase of 1.7 percent from the same month last year, and \$70 million more than the previous month.

In an attempt to bolster the pending sellout agreement, Caesars Entertainment CEO Thomas Reeg said during an earnings call last week that, “When we reach an agreement on the contract, it’s going to be the largest increase that our employees have seen in the four decades since we started interacting with the Culinary Union.”

Given that many workers have seen pay rises of less than \$5 an hour over the course of 20 years, this means that this ‘historic raise’ might not even cover what workers lost due to inflation over the course of the last contract.

Reeg also stated that they would be engaging in talks with the union over the next week and that they had meetings scheduled. This contradicts previous claims made by the union that “no negotiations” were scheduled with any of the three casino conglomerates.

An all-out strike by the Culinary Workers Union would affect 18 casino properties on the strip, with 35,000 workers, including guest room attendants, cocktail and food servers, porters, bellmen, cooks, bartenders, barbacks, laundry and kitchen workers. According to the union, it would be the largest strike of hospitality workers in history.

While that might be the case, for Las Vegas hospitality workers to actually win a “historic” contract, the conduct of the current struggle must be taken out of the hands of the union

bureaucrats and waged independently by rank-and-file workers. Negotiations should take place in public, live-streamed so every worker can be informed of what is being offered.

That the union is not engaged in serious struggle is evident by their actions. Instead of calling a strike after workers authorized it, the union has engaged in a series of phony pickets that have gotten workers arrested and depleted union funds.

Even if a strike is called, the union has announced that it will only be paying out a few hundred dollars a week to striking workers. The union said a strike fund would pay workers \$300 for the first week and \$400 the following week, if they walk a picket.

How workers are expected to live on that amount, which is less than unemployment insurance in Nevada, they did not say. While striking workers are expected to rely on a few hundred dollars a week, Pappageorge and the rest of the bureaucrats would continue to be paid their astronomical salaries.

For workers to win any fight against multinational corporations, they must do everything possible to broaden their struggle to as many sections of the working class as possible. Yet the union tops, tied by a thousand threads to the Democratic Party, exist precisely to isolate and divide each and every struggle in order to force through company-friendly contracts that maintain the status quo of continued impoverishment for workers.

The Culinary Workers Union, as is the case with the other major trade unions, is highly integrated into the Democratic Party. For decades the union has proudly boasted that it uses workers' dues money to organize "get out the vote" efforts for Democratic Party politicians. Every election cycle, the union bombards and badgers workers in the union to "toe the line" and vote for Democrats.

In the union history section on their website, the Culinary Union openly brags about its multi-decade relationship with the Democratic Party—a party that is currently overseeing and funding the genocide in Gaza with their fascistic colleagues in the Republican Party. The Culinary Union boasts:

- "Culinary Union members played an instrumental role in Senator Harry Reid's re-election in 1998." For decades, Senator Reid advanced an anti-worker, anti-immigrant, anti-democratic rights agenda, including advancing legislation to restrict abortion in 1999. In 1993, Reid introduced the Immigration Stabilization Act, which would have challenged the 14th Amendment and birthright citizenship.

Ten years later, the Culinary Union bragged that as a member of UNITE HERE, it was "the first labor union in the country to endorse then Senator Barack Obama, and Culinary Union members delivered Nevada for President Obama on Election Day."

Four years later, "110 union workers took a leave-of-absence from their jobs to work with the 2012 Culinary Union's Political Team to register and turn out members and their families to vote ... the Culinary Union's massive get-out-the-

vote effort ... delivered Nevada for President Obama again." That same year, former CEO of the Culinary Academy of Las Vegas, Steven Horsford, was elected to the House as a Democrat.

In order to win this struggle, hospitality workers need to begin to draw a balance sheet of the Culinary Workers Union.

The reason workers' living conditions have deteriorated while the corporations' profits have soared is because the Culinary Workers Union is a tool of the Democratic Party and the ruling class, not a fighting workers' organization.

This is not the result of "bad leadership" within the union, even though there is plenty of that, but an expression of the degeneration of the trade union form globally. In every country and every industry, a social chasm exists between the bureaucrats at the top of the trade unions and the rank-and-file who have to labor under the contracts they "negotiate" in secret with corporations overseen by capitalist governments.

The fact is there can be no return to "one job" or a "historic" victory for workers until they are allowed to actually use the tools of class struggle, including the general strike.

In order to win their demands, a joint struggle must be waged with workers in the Unite-Here union in Los Angeles who have been engaging in rolling strikes since the beginning of summer.

While the Culinary Workers Union refuses to discuss a joint strike encompassing all the hospitality workers in California, they also have not broached uniting with Las Vegas teachers, who are also currently working without a contract and are legally barred by the state from striking. Nor has there been any discussions on joint strike action with UAW casino workers in Detroit who work at the same resorts whose contract expired on September 30.

Hospitality workers can win this fight, but the first step is taking the leadership of this struggle out of the hands of the overpaid bureaucrats. Militant workers, ready to fight for a winning contract, must take the first step by connecting with like-minded workers and forming democratically controlled rank-and-file committees. These committees are independent of both the union bureaucracy and the two parties of big business, and will fight not only to popularize the strike, but to broaden the struggle to include Las Vegas teachers, Los Angeles hospitality workers and all other workers fighting for a better life.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact