

Culinary Workers Union cancels strike of Las Vegas Strip casinos at last minute

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Hours before a 5 am strike deadline last Friday, Culinary Workers Union Local 226 announced they had reached tentative agreements (TA) with all the casinos, and that there would be no strike of its tens of thousands of members on the Las Vegas Strip.

The first agreement with Caesars Entertainment, covering 10,000 workers, was announced by the union on Wednesday morning. A second agreement covering some 25,400 workers at MGM Resorts International was announced on Thursday, less than 24 hours before the strike deadline. Union bureaucrats finalized the third so-called “groundbreaking” TA with Wynn Resorts only three hours before the strike deadline arrived.

The announcement of the TA’s by the Culinary Workers Union has been accompanied by a barrage of propaganda from corporate, union and government officials singing its praises. But no concrete details have been made public, and no worker has been able to review any tentative agreement in full.

This has not prevented Ted Pappageorge, the former president of the Culinary Workers Union, current Secretary-Treasurer and well-paid lead negotiator, from modestly stating last week, “These are the best contracts ever.”

In an interview with the *New York Times* published over the weekend, Pappageorge asserted that the new contracts would provide compensation increases “far above” those in the last contract. Raises in the last contract amounted to a paltry \$4.57 per hour increase in wages, health care and pensions over the five year life of the deal.

Pappageorge claimed that by the end of the new five year contracts, workers compensation will have increased by an average of \$9 an hour, or less than \$2 a year. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 30 percent of the average worker’s paycheck goes to benefits. In reality, a yearly \$1.80 pay raise translates to \$1.26 an hour in take-home pay. This is equivalent to yearly raise of about \$50.40 a week, or, about 11 gallons of gas in Nevada.

That this is being touted by Pappageorge as an example of the “best contracts ever” is a testament to miserly agreements the Culinary Workers Union has “negotiated” on behalf of workers for decades.

For the last seven months since the Culinary Workers Union began talks with the casino corporations this past April, Pappageorge and the union have refused to comment publicly on any aspect of what their demands are, while at the same time, deliberately delaying a strike.

“We may be a little different than some other unions but there is a line we don’t cross on just bargaining in public,” Pappageorge told the *Nevada Current* last month. This secrecy was not aimed at getting a better contract, but from concealing from workers how little their raises will be.

That the contract will have no impact on the profit margins of the casinos was evident in statements made by millionaire CEO’s. Caesars Entertainment CEO Tom Reeg said, “This agreement is one that puts all of us in a position to move forward to greater success.”

Along with the paltry pay rise, Pappageorge claimed, that the TA had “protections” against changing technology as well as advancements in Artificial Intelligence.

Much like the SAG-AFTRA “protections” against AI, “protections” for hospitality workers consist in making the mega resorts agree to “define a technological change that could affect workers,” and provide “notification” of that change ahead of time. This worthless “protection” will not prevent the corporations from laying off workers or reducing hours. It only provides notice of intent.

Given these worthless protections and insufficient wage increases, this contract should be voted down as widely as possible. But workers also need to make the decision to move this struggle forward through the creation of rank-and-file committees that are democratically controlled and independent of the union bureaucracy and the two parties of

big business.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* warned in previous articles, the last thing the well-paid and politically connected Culinary Workers Union bureaucracy wanted, was to lead a strike.

Despite thousands of workers voting by an over 95 percent margin to authorize a strike at the end of September the union refused to set a strike date for nearly two months. This criminal refusal came as thousands of UNITE HERE hotel workers in California continued to conduct “rolling strikes” which have had zero effect on the hotels, but have cost workers their jobs.

Pointing to the pivotal role of the Culinary Workers Union in preventing a strike, MGM Resorts International CEO and President Bill Hornbuckle said, “We’re thankful to our employees and to the leadership of the Culinary and Bartenders Unions - especially Ted Pappageorge, Diana Valles, Terry Greenwald, and Lana Loebig, and their teams - who dedicated significant time and energy to negotiating this agreement that *works for all parties*.” (emphasis added)

Michael Weaver, the spokesman for Wynn Las Vegas said, “Wynn has historically enjoyed a relationship with Unite Here that is based on mutual respect and a shared interest in doing the best we can for those most important to us – our employees. This year has been no exception. We look forward to ratification of our agreement soon”

The most damning praise, however, came from the strike-breaker in chief, “Genocide Joe” Biden. On Friday, the Culinary Workers Union official Twitter (X) account approvingly retweeted a White House statement from Biden congratulating “the Culinary and Bartenders Unions” for an agreement that “will help give all workers the quality of life they deserve.” The fact that the Culinary Workers Union favorably retweeted Biden is also a damning exposure of the union bureaucracy.

Prior to becoming President, Senator Biden cast votes that deregulated banks, made it harder for working people to escape onerous credit card and student loan debt and stripped bankruptcy protection from homeowners with limited income, ensuring millions of people would lose their homes during the Great Recession.

As president, with bi-partisan support from Congress, Biden blocked railroad workers from striking last year in order to impose a contract they had already rejected. After intervening in the West Coast dockworkers and UPS struggle earlier this year, last week, Biden joined UAW President Shawn Fain at a “back to work” rally in Illinois,

aimed at promoting the garbage contracts agreed to by the UAW bureaucracy and the Big Three auto companies.

The impoverishment of workers has not only been overseen by Biden, the two parties of big business and Wall Street, but by the trade union apparatus. The Culinary Workers Union, a member of UNITE HERE, has overseen decades of sellout contracts while promoting the Democratic Party.

The struggle of casino workers takes place amid a growing wave of struggles by workers around the US and the world. Already this year, there have been 312 strikes involving roughly 453,000 workers, compared to 180 strikes involving 43,700 workers just two years, according to Johnnie Kallas, a PhD candidate at Cornell University’s School of Industrial and Labor Relations, and project director of the ILR Labor Action Tracker.

If casino workers, and other sections of the working class, are going to reverse the attacks on the living standards and win the wages and benefits they deserve, not what Biden and the union bureaucrats think they deserve, workers must break from the degenerated trade union bureaucracies and begin forming independent rank-and-file committees, controlled by militant workers. These committees will coordinate with other workers across industries and national boundaries in order to take the fight to the multinational corporations.

Hospitality workers interested in organizing for a ‘no’ vote, and a strategy for victory, should contact the *World Socialist Web Site* today.



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