

Following latest contract betrayal

Culinary Workers Union hosts Democratic Party rally featuring VP Harris in Las Vegas

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On January 3, Vice President Kamala Harris and acting Labor Secretary Julie Su spoke at the Culinary Workers Union Local 226 headquarters in Las Vegas, Nevada, in support of a series of sellout contracts the union forced through last year.

Joining Harris and Su at the Culinary Workers Union Local 226 headquarters were several Democratic Nevada politicians, including Senators Catherine Cortez Masto and Jacky Rosen and Representatives Dina Titus, Steven Horsford and Susie Lee. The event assumed the character of a campaign rally, with the pre-selected crowd of select union members, bureaucrats and politicians zealously whooping and hollering after the politicians touted their, and the Biden-Harris administration's, so-called "accomplishments."

In their remarks, none of the speakers mentioned the ongoing US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza. This omission was not a mistake; it reflects the symbiotic role between the union tops and the Democratic Party. Union bureaucrats praise the Democrats, who in turn praise the unions as they function as a police force to keep workers in line as the US hurtles toward global war.

As the politicians and bureaucrats were glad-handing each other inside the facility, outside dozens of anti-genocide protesters demanded an immediate ceasefire and an end to the US-backed slaughter in Gaza, which has officially claimed the lives of over 22,000 people as of this writing.

"There is only one solution, *intifada*, revolution!," was one of several chants heard outside the building. While Harris's visit was widely reported in the mainstream

bourgeois press, the protest against the support of the Biden-Harris administration for ethnic cleansing was completely ignored in media reports on the visit.

The appearance of so many Democratic politicians at Wednesday's event underscores the role of the Culinary Workers Union as a labor police for the government and corporations. For decades Local 226, perhaps more so than any other union, has functioned as a direct appendage of the Democratic Party in Las Vegas. The union proudly boasts of organizing "get out the vote" efforts for Democratic politicians, while at the same time keeping workers on the job, even as old contracts expire.

Harris's ninth visit to Las Vegas was no different from previous ones; the VP came to bolster the union's credentials in light of the recent contract betrayals and to offset Biden's sinking poll numbers and gin up support for the 2024 presidential election campaign.

In her vacuous and meandering remarks, however, Harris falsely proclaimed the "historic" nature of the fight waged by the Local 226 and stressed the alleged "fairness" of the recent contract.

There is nothing "fair" about the contracts forced through last year. After stringing workers along for months with stunt strikes and rallies that did nothing to impinge on profits, last November Local 226 hurriedly rammed through contracts for over 40,000 hospitality and casino workers. After the agreements were signed, CEOs of the major casinos hailed the sellouts. "This agreement is one that puts all of us in a position to move forward to greater success," Caesars Entertainment CEO Tom Reeg said at that time.

While casino magnates have hailed the agreements, one worker responded to Harris's visit by writing on the Local 226 Facebook page, "I've been working downtown at the casino for 35 years and I still make \$11.86 an hour. I'm a tipped employee and cocktail service. How many people in this country still get \$11.86 an hour and are in a union? My pension after 30 years will be less than \$800 per month. What union in the United States has a pension after 30 years of \$800 a month?"

Speaking on Wednesday, acting labor secretary Su also falsely invoked the supposed "historic" nature of the gains achieved by hospitality workers in the latest contract negotiations. "From Hollywood to healthcare, from delivery drivers to dockworkers, from teachers to autoworkers, and yes to casino and culinary workers, you all made history," Su said.

The historic nature of the deal lies in its baseness as well as the brazenness with which the union tops sold this monumental betrayal to workers. The actual increase in wages averages out to less than \$2 an hour a year, at a time when inflation was the highest in decades. Notably, the last contracts were pushed through as the Nevada casinos reported that November saw the second-largest monthly win in the history of US gaming industry.

The casino contracts were part of a series of rotten contracts that in many cases were imposed by the trade union bureaucracy after Su's intervention.

As Su herself admitted, "I was in the room for many of the big negotiations that happened last year." This confirms, as the WSWS reported at the time, that the "negotiations" were in fact a conspiracy between management, the union, and the government against workers across every industry.

She then went on to stump for the Biden-Harris ticket by concluding her remarks with the statement: "Now it's 2024 and we are going to keep on reimagining what is possible for workers. The Biden-Harris Administration is going to keep on saying loud and clear that unions make America strong, and when workers do well America does better! So, I'm very proud to be your acting labor secretary in the most pro-worker pro-union administration in history and 2024 is going to be our best year."

This is an administration that, along with the Democrats and Republicans in Congress, made it illegal for railroad workers to go on strike in December 2022. Su, Biden and Harris are only "pro-union" in the sense that they support the union tops, who sell below-inflation contracts as "victories" while promoting war-criminal Democratic Party politicians. Meanwhile, the rank-and-file workers, despite being dues-paying union members, have seen their standard of living continually declining for decades.

The chasm that exists between the reality experienced by rank-and-file workers, and the well-paid top layers of the union bureaucracy was exemplified in remarks given by Ted Pappageorge, Secretary-Treasurer for Local 226, at a "celebratory event" the union hosted with Su and Second Gentleman Douglas Emhoff.

At the event, Pappageorge, the former president of the union, said that, with Biden and Harris in office, "workers know we've got backup and political leadership that values working families, and that's just, it's a big deal for us. It gives us hope and strength."

Workers need to begin to draw a balance sheet of the last few decades. As the genocide in Gaza continues to deepen, the Biden administration and entire capitalist state march inexorably towards war, and they are using the trade unions to impose contracts that further impoverish workers and their families.

There is only one answer to the questions of both receiving a decent standard of living and preventing war and genocide, and that is a turn to the working class, through the creation of independent rank-and-file committees that are democratically controlled by workers themselves, not bureaucrats beholden to the Democratic Party.



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