



Source: Daily Labor Report: All Issues > 2010 > January > 01/05/2010 > News > Hotels: UNITE HERE Calls for Boycott of Hilton In San Francisco, Seventh Hotel in City

01 DLR A-2

Hotels

UNITE HERE Calls for Boycott of Hilton In San Francisco, Seventh Hotel in City

UNITE HERE Local 2 has announced union-represented hotel workers will rally Jan. 5 for new contracts in San Francisco and call for a boycott of the Hilton Hotel Union Square, the seventh hotel targeted by the union in that city as negotiations drag on for contracts that expired in August.

In an effort to "heat up the new year," UNITE HERE President John Wilhelm and AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka will lead the rally and march on Market Street to Union Square to bring national attention to the contract negotiations for new citywide hotel contracts covering some 9,000 hotel workers, Local 2 spokeswoman Riddhi Mehta told BNA Jan. 4. Multiple hotel contracts that expired in 2009 in San Francisco, Chicago (169 DLR A-4, 9/3/09), and Los Angeles (233 DLR A-13, 12/8/09) remain unsettled.

In 2010, hotel contracts expire in six more North American cities—Minneapolis; Washington, D.C.; Monterey, Calif.; Honolulu; and Vancouver, B.C.; and Toronto. Contracts in the nine cities cover about 50,000 hotel employees, Mehta said.

The union already has called for consumer boycotts at six San Francisco hotels, urging customers of the Grand Hyatt Union Square Hotel, the Palace Hotel, the Westin St. Francis Hotel, the Hyatt Fisherman's Wharf, Le Meridien San Francisco, and the W Hotel to move their business to a non-disputed San Francisco hotel.

In October, Local 2 members voted to give union negotiators the authority to call for actions up to and including strikes against hotels in the city if talks do not produce new labor agreements to replace the contracts that expired Aug. 14 (204 DLR A-2, 10/26/09). In November, UNITE HERE Local 2 conducted three-day strikes at the Grand Hyatt Union Square (213 DLR A-13, 11/6/09), the Palace (216 DLR A-5, 11/12/09), and the Westin St. Francis (221 DLR A-13, 11/19/09) involving about 1,000 housekeepers, bartenders, porters, waiters, and cooks.

In addition to boycotts called at the unionized hotels, the boycotts aimed at the Le Meridien and Hyatt Fisherman's Wharf involve properties where the union has been conducting an organizing campaign among hotel workers since June 2008.

On Dec. 16, Local 2 extended its calls for a consumer boycott to the W Hotel, managed by Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide Inc., which also manages the Palace and Westin St. Francis.

"We've proposed the cheapest contract in the union's history while the corporations continue to make millions," John Elrod, a bartender at the W Hotel, said in a union statement. "I think the hotel workers have sacrificed enough. It's time for the hotel corporations to realize that we're not going to give up."

Health Care the Biggest Issue

Health care benefits are the most important issue for hotel workers in San Francisco this year and the issue has dominated contract negotiations, according to both the union and employers.

Unlike in 2006, when all of the downtown hotels bargained together as the San Francisco Multiemployer Group for the previous contract, Local 2 is negotiating separately with the largest hotel operators, including Starwood, Hyatt, and Blackstone Group, for 31 different hotels.

In 2004, San Francisco's first hotel strike in 24 years turned into a lockout as 10 other hotels that were part of a multiemployer group refused to allow employees to work after four properties were

struck (191 DLR AA-1, 10/4/04). The contract was settled two years later (186 DLR A-1, 9/26/06).

Local 2 President Mike Casey now has proposed a "cheap" one-year settlement as a way to get past the economic downturn without permanent worker givebacks.

Michael Dunne, general manager of the Hilton Hotel Union Square, told BNA Jan. 4 that the hotel would like a long-term contract, which he said is in the best interests of both the employees and the hotel.

Local 2 and the Hilton Hotel Union Square have not had contract talks since October, but "we want to get back to the table and negotiations. We're going to get there. I hope it will be sooner rather than later," Dunne said. He attributed the lapse in negotiations to timing because so many hotels are negotiating separately.

He added, "We would rather not be part of the boycott."

UNITE HERE Conducted National Campaign in 2006

In 2006, when numerous hotel collective bargaining agreements expired in six major North American cities, UNITE HERE conducted a national campaign as a way to gain clout at the bargaining table. The union did not seek nationwide contracts but coordinated efforts nationally "as a way to obtain fairness for workers" (12 DLR A-12, 1/19/06).

Wages and benefits are determined on a market basis and therefore vary from one city to another, but UNITE HERE said at the time that global hotel chains should establish worker standards regardless of location. The union had worked to establish common expiration dates in a single year to gain negotiating strength "on a level playing field" with global hotel chains such as Hilton, Hyatt, Starwood, and Marriott.

By having multiple collective bargaining agreements expiring in the same year, the union has said it can call attention to the issues important to hotel workers as a way to raise standards for the workers and emphasize the value of their work.

By Susan R. Hobbs

Contact us at <http://www.bna.com/contact/index.html> or call 1-800-372-1033

ISSN 1522-5968

Copyright © 2010, The Bureau of National Affairs, Inc.. Reproduction or redistribution, in whole or in part, and in any form, without express written permission, is prohibited except as permitted by the BNA Copyright Policy. <http://www.bna.com/corp/index.html#V>