

No negotiations, no contract

Holiday Inn union workers, Seaside Co. haven't talked in six months

By TOM LONG
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SANTA CRUZ — More than a year after the Seaside Company began negotiations with union employees at the local Holiday Inn, no contract has been signed — a fact that has led to picketing, a boycott and threats of a strike.

It has been a half-year since talks have even been held between the company, which owns the hotel, and negotiators for Hotel Employees & Restaurant Employees Union Local 483.

"The company hasn't even contacted us in six months," said Jennifer Wintrode, a union organizer.

"We haven't talked," said Seaside spokeswoman Ann Parker, referring to both the union and the company. "Communication takes two sides."

As a result, some 40-50 Holiday Inn employees are still working without a contract. That number of union employees is expected to swell to 80-90 come spring, when tourism picks up.

When the Seaside Company bought the Holiday Inn in November 1989 for \$7.9 million, it immediately hired back 96 of the 98 employees after they re-applied for their jobs. The company also raised wages for all employees except those who earn tips.

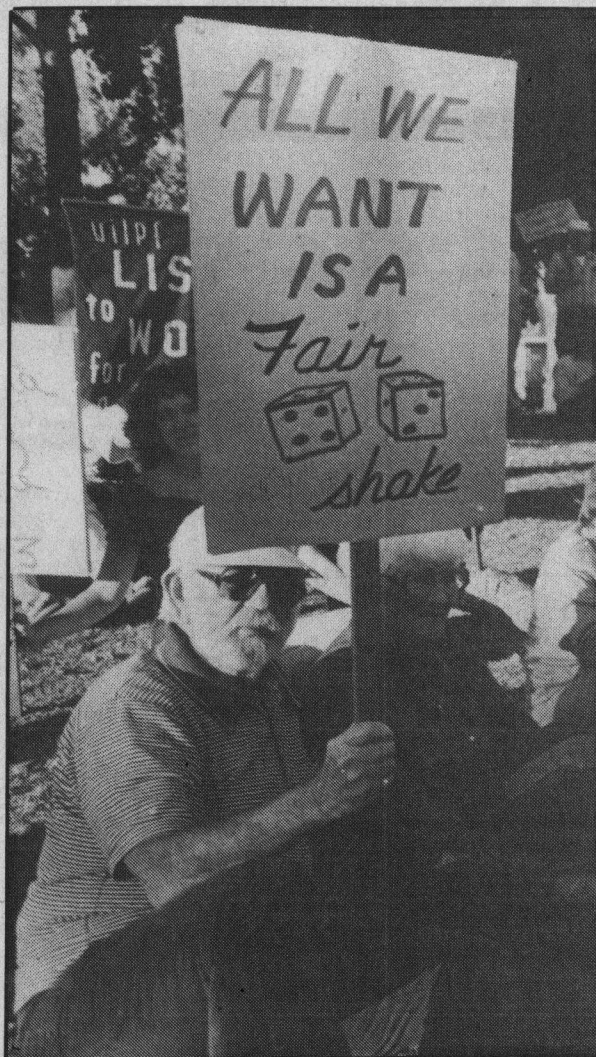
But union officials were concerned about contract negotiations even before the purchase was finalized, since the Seaside Company had been involved in major union disputes twice in the 1980s.

Those concerns materialized when contract negotiations came to a halt about seven months after they began. That halt was caused by three key issues:

- The union wants a "union shop" clause in the contract requiring new hires to join the union. The company wants new employees to have a choice of whether or not to join.

- The union is also demanding that part-time employees have their dependents covered by their health insurance, a benefit not now offered. Organizers argue that many of the part-time employees are the ones who most need dependent coverage.

"Right now we don't have any of our single moms or people who need dependent health care coverage really getting it," said Wintrode.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel file

Holiday Inn worker holds sign at 1989 rally.

- A company proposal that workers be eligible to be dismissed for "business reasons" is seen as a way for the company to avoid union grievance proceedings.

The union has been picketing the Cocoanut Grove Ballroom at the company's Boardwalk property every Sunday, and is promoting a boycott of all Seaside investments, including the Holiday Inn and the Boardwalk. And there is talk of an eventual strike at the hotel if negotiations aren't resumed.

"We have called for a boycott of Seaside Company properties," said Wintrode. "At this moment we don't have a strike plan but it may come to that."

Wintrode said the local union members have contacted unions throughout the San Jose area and will be actively encouraging people to boycott both the Holiday Inn and the Boardwalk.

"We're saying, 'Come on over to Santa Cruz, but don't go to Seaside property,'" Wintrode said. "We're going to be trying to cut down their business by 10-20 percent."

The Seaside Company refused to discuss the contract negotiations in the press.

"The company feels like it's just not appropriate to do negotiations through the media," said company spokeswoman Parker. "We are still willing to negotiate, but we don't want to simplify complex issues by making simple statements and having them bandied about in public."

"We do have some sticking points and those are the things that are still up in the air," said Parker. "We're not trying to force anybody out."

Parker also said, "The picketing hasn't caused a noticeable drop-off in business. We're on good terms with the picketers — we don't have a standoff vendetta going on or anything."

The Seaside Company has battled the hotel and restaurant union twice in the past decade — at the earthquake-destroyed Casa del Rey retirement hotel and at the Cocoanut Grove. The Casa del Rey dispute was resolved in 1984 when the employees there voted to drop out of the union. And an attempt to enlist Cocoanut Grove employees in the union in 1988 failed.