

Employees at four hotels would strike

1,200 workers make their demands at the height of the Christmas season
Hotel workers held a protest in front of the El San Juan Hotel in Isla Verde.

By [Yaritza Rivas](#) / yrivas@elnuevodia.com

At the height of the season in the country's hotels, almost 1,200 employees at the Caribe Hilton, Conrad Condado Plaza, Radisson Ambassador Plaza and El San Juan hotels could possibly go on strike if a strike vote is passed this coming Tuesday, when negotiations are expected to resume between the Gastronomic Union Local 610 and management of those hotels.

Workers will cast their strike vote during this Christmas week if management "does not come to the table in good faith in order to reach an agreement", said Félix Mejías, the Union's President, during a rally which was held yesterday in front of the El San Juan Hotel in Isla Verde.

Mejías claimed that, since the negotiation process started in September, management "has not taken us seriously" because they send intermediaries who "are not well prepared".

Raúl Bustamante, General Manager of the Conrad Condado Plaza Hotel, claims that the conflict encountered at the negotiations table is related to the numerous demands made by the Union. In addition, Bustamante claimed that intervention by Unite Here, which is the international representative of the Union members, has affected the agreements. According to Mejías, workers are demanding respect and dignity from the employer. This is in connection with policies which, as stated by some workers, included being forbidden from speaking Spanish among themselves in the presence of guests.

According to Irac López, Union representative, this policy had to be modified due to pressure by the Union. Currently employees are required to speak English in work areas when guests are present, said López. According to the demonstrators, this incident took place at the Caribe Hilton Hotel.

Hotel management was not available for comment as of the close of this edition.

On another issue, workers are demanding health insurance coverage which actually "works". Milagros Guzmán, a housekeeper for 15 years at the Radisson Ambassador Plaza, has stopped going to her doctor because "no one accepts this plan", she said when referring to Prosalud, the insurance choice offered by her employer when Preferred Health was liquidated by the Insurance Commissioner.

"Not even the emergency room accepts it", said Guzmán, who travels from Luquillo to San Juan to go to work.

In closing, Mejías added that workers are demanding a salary increase.

Bustamante stated that offers which include "significant increases" in salaries and healthcare benefits have been made to Union employees at the Condado Plaza.

According to Bustamante, the Caribe Hilton offered a bonus.

In case of a strike, at least the Conrad has a contingency plan.

According to Bustamante they will continue operating “without any difficulties”, because they would hire staff or bring employees from other hotels.

“But that is not what we want to do. We want to reach an agreement and sign the contract”, stated Bustamante.

The Union’s president stated that, in the event that workers do go on strike, they would have a \$300 weekly benefit.