

Casino San Pablo workers accuse city of complicity in labor dispute

Written by Administrator

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SAN PABLO -- A group of Casino San Pablo workers and their union petitioned the City Council on Monday to help them in their long battle over wages and benefits, even as they accused the city of complicity in violating their collective bargaining and other labor rights. Jessica Medina, an organizer for Unite Here Local 2850, the union representing more than 150 food service, housekeeping and other Casino San Pablo workers, told the council that the casino management has banned her and two other organizers from entering the premises. Isidoro Ramos, a Casino San Pablo worker for 12 years and a union shop steward, told the council that the management threatened him with disciplinary action last year after a union organizer came to the casino to talk to him. Ramos said San Pablo police ushered the organizer out under threat of arrest. "We are not delinquents. We are not criminals," Ramos told the council, adding: "It's not right that Casino San Pablo makes lots of money while workers are left behind." Larry Stidham, the attorney for the casino and its owner, the Lytton Band of Pomo Indians, said, "(The union organizers) were excluded for their behavior at the casino." Unite Here says its members earn an average of \$9.50 an hour at Casino San Pablo and that many have been reduced from full-time to part-time work, causing them to lose their benefits. The casino has said it pays wages and provides benefits comparable with the rest of the industry in California. The city projects revenue of \$15.25 million from the casino in fiscal 2012-2013 -- \$1.75 million in lieu of taxes plus \$13.5 million, or a 7.5 percent cut of gross gambling revenue, in accordance with a 1999 Municipal Services Agreement as amended in 2003. Revenue from the casino makes up just short of two-thirds of San Pablo's \$24 million general fund; extrapolating from the city's revenue projections for its cut, the casino would be poised to gross \$180 million this fiscal year. Religious and economic justice activists accompanied the workers to Monday's council meeting. Jahmese Myres, of the East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy, accused the city of complicity with the casino in violating the workers' rights when, she said, the police enforced the ban on the union organizers from entering the casino. She also accused the city of violating the Municipal Services Agreement, which explicitly protects casino workers' collective bargaining rights. The National Labor Relations Board will hold a hearing in Oakland on Oct. 29. The board lodged a complaint against the casino in late August alleging a wide range of unfair labor practices, including failure to bargain with the union; unilateral changes to terms and conditions of employment; failure to provide contractual health and welfare benefits to several employees; reducing the number of shifts of several employees without bargaining; changing the rules for union access to workers; and others. Stidham has disputed the allegations and vowed to contest them at the hearing. The union has tried in the past to get the City Council to weigh in on its side, noting that several council members are outspoken advocates of unions in general. But so far, the council and its members have mostly encouraged the two sides to come to a fair resolution. On Monday, Mayor Cecilia Valdez said the council will consider the matter and keep an eye on it but did not elaborate. Myres said she would like to see the matter on the City Council agenda. The next scheduled meeting is Nov. 5, a week after the National Labor Relations Board hearing. San Pablo police Chief Walt Schuld deferred comment to City Manager Matt Rodriguez, who said the city would have no comment in view of the upcoming hearing. Contact Tom Lochner at 510-262-2760. Follow him at twitter.com/tomlochner

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