

## Media Articles on Law Firm

### **S.F. Hotel Workers Gain 5-Year Contract 11 luxury sites settle, but 44 still need to negotiate**

*By Carol Emert  
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Capping three months of negotiations, San Francisco hotel workers yesterday reached accord on a five-year contract with 11 of the city's biggest luxury hotels.

But the threat of an autumn strike remains at 44 other hotels and motels that have yet to reach a contract with their employees.

Yesterday's agreement includes 3 to 5 percent annual wage increases and higher pension benefits for room cleaners, dishwashers and other workers. Some 4,000 union members of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union Local 2 are expected to ratify the pact on Thursday.

"This agreement will, we hope, set the pattern" for future negotiations, said Mike Casey, the union president. "We will use it as the standard for the other Class A hotels." The agreement is retroactive to August 14, when the prior five-year contract expired.

For employers, the agreement translates into a 4.25 percent increase in annual outlays, said Stuart Korshak, chief negotiator for the Multi-Employer Group, a negotiating block representing the 11 hotels.

The union and the employer group have been hammering out the contract's details in a San Francisco Hilton conference room for three months. Each day, 100 union members gave up their shifts -- and wages -- to sit behind the negotiating table and put additional pressure on the employers. Informal discussions between the two sides have been taking place for nearly a year.

While yesterday's announcement was accompanied by hugs and cheers, the talks were not always rosy. On Labor Day, the union threatened a strike and staged demonstrations resulting in numerous arrests.

Still, yesterday's accord is expected to be a cakewalk compared with the next round of negotiations, which involves 12 other Class A hotels and Local 2. The Multi-Employer Group and the union have a 5-year-old partnership in which the two sides met in joint committees and study groups to discuss contentious issues.

Because of this partnership, the two sides agreed to settle some of the most nettlesome topics, such as scheduling, safety and workers' compensation benefits, away from the bargaining table, said Korshak.

# Korshak, Kracoff, Kong & Sugano, L.L.P.

Had they been included, "these things could have wound up as strike issues," Korshak said.

Three luxury hotels, the Mark Hopkins, the Miyako and the W, have signed so-called "me-too" agreements saying they will go along with the terms of the Multi-Employer Group contract, Casey said.

The remaining nine Class A hotels will negotiate with the union individually, and their relationship with the union is not as close, said Casey.

"We are willing to strike just like we did at the Mark Hopkins in '94," the last hotel strike in the city, Casey said. Workers at different hotels will band together, he said. "Employers should understand that if they take one of us on, they take all of us on."

Yesterday's deal covers the Argent, Crowne Plaza Union Square, Fairmont, Holiday Inn Civic Center, Holiday Inn Financial District, Holiday Inn Fisherman's Wharf, Hyatt Regency, Grand Hyatt, San Francisco Hilton, Sheraton Palace and the Westin St. Francis.

Next week, talks will begin with the Holiday Inn Golden Gate, the Sheraton Fisherman's Wharf, Parc 55, the Clift, the Huntington, Stanford Court, Marriott Fisherman's Wharf, Cathedral Hill Hotel and Ramada Fisherman's Wharf.

Those hotels, along with the three "me-too" hotels, employ about 4,000 union members.

By November, the union hopes to have started talks with a third group of employers representing the city's 32 Class B hotels and motels. Some of them may form a negotiating block modeled after the Multi-Employer Group, Casey said.

The lowest-paid workers -- dishwashers and room cleaners -- reap most of the benefits from the agreement reached yesterday. Their wages will increase from about \$12 an hour to \$15 in the contract's fifth year, said Casey.

Employers' annual pension contribution will double to \$30 per employee per year of service. Twenty-year veterans will receive \$600 per year, for example.

Beginning in January, cleaners will be expected to tidy a maximum of 14 rooms per day, instead of the current 15. For Nellie Asuncion, who has been sitting in the Hilton negotiating room for three months, that is the most important provision of the contract.

"It's really hard to clean 15 rooms in a day," Asuncion said. "We hope to get a deal like this one at the Parc 55, where I work."