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CHUN ZHU,  
A DEALER AT BALLY'S ATLANTIC CITY

# No deal yet for casinos and union

## Workers who won representation at 4 gambling houses wait for contract

BY WAYNE PARRY  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Union, yes. Contract, no. That's the reality right now in Atlantic City, where dealers at four casinos have won elections allowing them to form unions over the past year. But none of the unions has succeeded in getting a contract with any of the gambling houses.

The euphoria that followed a wave of organizing success among Atlantic City's 11 casinos has given way to frustration at the slow pace of contract talks. Because of that, a group of workers, elected officials and labor officials held a rally yesterday to call on the casinos to bargain fairly with the unions.

"We played by the rules, won an election, and wanted to deal fairly and squarely" with management, said Aneil Patel, a dealer at Caesars Atlantic City for 14 years. "But the company still doesn't get it. That's why we are stepping up this fight."

Chun Zhu, a dealer at Bally's Atlantic City for three years, said he came to this country from China 20 years ago confident that if one played by the rules in America, they would be rewarded.

"But rather than work with us to make Bally's better, they found millions of dollars to hire consultants to fight us," he said. "We deal the cards that make their profits."

So far the United Auto Workers has won

union representation elections at Caesars, Bally's, the Tropicana Casino and Resort, and Trump Plaza Hotel and Casino.

It lost elections at Trump Marina Hotel Casino and the Atlantic City Hilton Casino Resort.

The union plans to try to organize workers at all 11 casinos in Atlantic City. Talks with Caesars have been going on for more than a year; Bally's and Trump have not yet started negotiations.

"It's not unusual for it to take this long," said David Krenkel, an Ocean Township labor lawyer. He said federal law requires both sides to bargain in good faith, showing a willingness to listen and work toward an agreement.

Alyce Parker, a spokeswoman for Harrah's Entertainment, which operates four casinos in Atlantic City including Bally's and Caesars, said the company and the union had agreed not to discuss contract talks with the media.

The Casino Association of New Jersey, the industry's trade group, did not immediately respond to a request for comment yesterday.

Among the chief issues the union is seeking to negotiate are salary increases, job security, more full-time jobs and better health care coverage for part-time workers.

The talks come as Atlantic City's casinos are smarting from their first-ever down year in 2007, when revenue declined by 5.7 percent from the previous year, due largely to competition from

newly opened slots parlors in neighboring states.

Further complicating matters is the uncertain status of the Tropicana, whose former owners, Columbia Sussex Corp., were stripped of their casino license in December, forcing the property to be sold. A new buyer is being sought, making it difficult for interim management to conduct meaningful negotiations.

And next Wednesday, the city council is set to pass a total smoking ban for the gambling floors at all 11 casinos, which has casino executives predicting additional revenue declines. It would take effect Oct. 15.

Unionizing dealers has been a decades-long goal in Atlantic City. In late 1982, dealers at what was then called Bally's Park Place voted to form a union, but were unable to reach agreement with the company on a contract, and went on strike the following May.

That work stoppage proved disastrous, falling apart after three days and ending with Sports Arena and Casino Employees Local 137 waiving its right to act as bargaining representatives for the casino's dealers.

This time will be different, organizers vowed.

"What these casinos know is you can go anywhere in the country and build something, and have it non-union," said Roy Foster, president of the Atlantic/Cape May Central Labor Council. "But not in our house. Build it union and maintain it union or get the hell out of town."