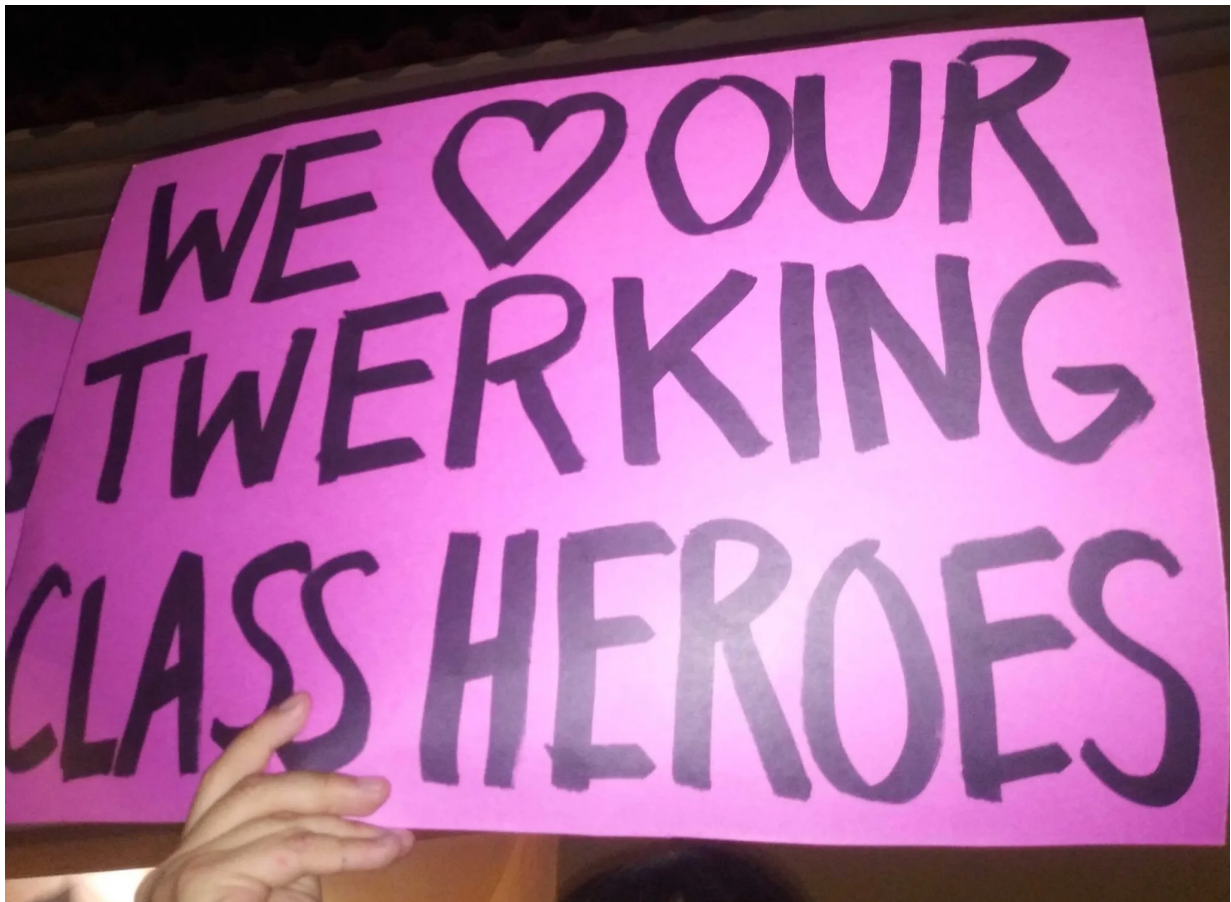


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Striking NoHo Strippers Vote to Unionize

North Hollywood's Star Garden seeks to be the nation's first unionized strip club since the Lusty Lady.

[Nessa Moreno](#) | [May 17, 2022](#)



A labor movement for better working [conditions](#) is taking place across the country, and here in Los Angeles. For the last eight weeks, strippers at Star Garden in North Hollywood have been demanding safety and privacy protections as well as the negotiation of fair contracts. In March, they delivered a [petition](#) to management outlining their concerns.

Since then, the strippers have voted to unionize with Strippers United, an organization founded in 2018. The Star Garden workers asked the owners to certify their newly formed union with a voluntary recognition agreement.

[According to](#) Antonia Crane of Strippers United, this would make Star Garden the first unionized strip club in the US since the [Lusty Lady](#), a San Francisco club that unionized in 1997. The Lusty Lady closed its doors in 2013.

After Stripper Strike NoHo began on March 18, strippers who walked off the job were unjustly fired for voicing concerns about safety, wage theft, and exploitation. Strippers have also called the current owners out for alleged anti-Black racist hiring practices that violate the Civil Rights Act.

Knock LA reached out multiple times to current Star Garden owners Stepan “Steve” Kazaryan and Yevgenya “Jenny” Kararyan for comment on racial discrimination in their hiring practices, but they have yet to respond.

Steve and Jenny Kararyan are also the current owners of Dreams in Long Beach. They became owners of the Star Garden in July 2021.

Since the delivery of the strippers’ [petition](#) demanding management and security take their concerns seriously, Star Garden security guards have called some of the striking strippers by their legal names in front of customers while on the picket line.

Laws protecting sex workers are [practically nil to none](#), and [violence](#) against sex workers is under-reported. Treatment from management often includes wage theft disguised as “stage fees.”

Velveeta, a stripper on the picket line, told *Knock LA* that strippers working in clubs are often misclassified as independent contractors. This is against California labor laws, including AB5, which recognizes strippers as gainfully employed by clubs. Star Garden’s owners also started enforcing a \$200 tip quota, causing grounds for termination if quota isn’t met — which is also illegal and against AB5.

In 2019, Velveeta sued the prior Star Garden owner Akop Gasparyan for wage theft, misclassification, and retaliation. Yet, clubs in LA and beyond continue to steal wages from strippers.

Velveeta hopes their newly formed union can eventually own a strip club establishment.

“Once we own a club, we can implement anti-discrimination practices... which is important to all of us. I have brown and Black friends who are amazing strippers turned away the second they come into audition [at Star Garden]. It’s so messed up,” Velveeta said. “I think the reason why sex workers and strippers haven’t been able to organize is because of stigma. It’s hard to organize with a very changeable group. It’s a turnover because of the lack of protection.”

Sex worker organizing has sprouted in recent years [post-FOSTA/SESTA](#), and isn’t just limited to Los Angeles. Sex worker organization efforts across the nation include [Women With Vision](#), [BARE of New Orleans](#), and [Bay Area Worker Support](#), as well as [Stripper Strike Portland](#), [New York](#), and [Philadelphia](#).

“There are a lot of things a unionized stripper workforce could fight for and win,” said Reagan, an organizer of the NoHo Stripper Strike. “We started this fight just asking for basic safety in the workplace, and

management responded with retaliation and disrespect. We want it all. We want a union.”

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