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Grand Theft Action

Behind the world's most anticipated video game lies a bitter dispute over union rights, overtime and the price of speaking up

In July 2023, the US Congress heard testimony from witnesses about unidentified flying objects. On TikTok, the outcome of the hearing was quickly summed up: we got aliens before GTA 6 came out. The aliens were a joke. The wait was real. 'We got X before GTA 6' became a formula for anything on the internet considered unlikely enough to be compared to the video game Grand Theft Auto VI. After all, fans have been waiting for its release since its predecessor came out in 2013.

The long-awaited moment is finally set to arrive on 19 November. By then, an important vote will already have been underway at developer Rockstar for a week. According to the Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain, around 1 600 employees in the UK can vote until 26 November on whether their union should be formally recognised and be able to negotiate with the company. Their demands include greater pay transparency, flexible working and limits on excessive overtime. But whether this will lead to better working conditions for the developers will only become clear after GTA VI is released.

How can employees organise collectively to defend their interests if they cannot even be sure their conversations are private?

While fans are counting down to the game's launch, employees are concerned with shaping their everyday working lives. In GTA, you can break the law, steal cars and plunge entire neighbourhoods into chaos. The people who make all this possible, by contrast, would like a little more predictability. After all, even if your job involves enabling late-night robberies, you'd still like to finish work on time.

But the vote is not the only labour dispute Rockstar is facing just before the release of its blockbuster. While some employees are voting for better working conditions, others are already fighting for their jobs in court. And a platform familiar to gamers everywhere is at the centre of the dispute: Discord, a service for text and voice chats that is particularly

popular in the gaming community.

Rockstar employees used a private Discord channel to discuss their working conditions. In October 2025, the company dismissed more than 30 employees in the UK and Canada. Rockstar says the dismissals were due to the sharing of confidential information, including internal emails, via Discord. Those affected see things differently: 23 former employees are taking their dismissals to an employment tribunal in Glasgow. They accuse Rockstar of dismissing them because of their trade union activities. The company is also facing allegations that it monitored union activity. Rockstar is said to have obtained information from the private Discord channel through an informant.

The dispute raises a question that extends far beyond the gaming industry: how can employees organise collectively to defend their interests if they cannot even be sure their conversations are private?

After all, trade union organising does not begin with a vote or a list of shared demands. Sometimes it starts when someone complains about a change to the rota. A colleague mentions unpaid overtime, another describes similar experiences. It is only through these conversations that individual frustration turns into the realisation that others are facing the same problems. And perhaps into a desire to do something about them together.

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But anyone who fears that their manager might be reading along in what they believe to be a private chat will think twice before posting. Even the fear of being monitored can be enough to make people fall silent. In this way, trade union organising can be prevented before it has even properly begun.

There is a certain irony in Discord becoming the stage for this particular dispute. For millions of gamers, the platform is a place to connect with like-minded people, form teams and plan joint activities. In GTA Online, too, a successful heist depends on having reliable accomplices. But if you do not know whether your fellow players are on your side, it is difficult to commit to a shared mission. In the game, the most you stand to lose is virtual loot. In the workplace, the stakes can be considerably higher.

But what are GTA fans supposed to make of all this? Should they show solidarity by giving up the game they have been waiting so long for? Those who have been dismissed already gave a surprisingly clear answer to that question in August. In a union video, they explicitly ask people

not to boycott GTA VI. Jack Hoxby, one of the dismissed employees, explains that they have devoted years of their lives to developing the game. Those who want to help them can instead contribute financially to their legal battle. The union has even launched a range of T-shirts, with the proceeds going towards funding the case.

The good news for all GTA fans is that they do not have to choose between excitement and solidarity. They can have both: Playing GTA VI — in a trade union T-shirt.



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