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Thousands of hotel workers protest at Hyatts

By Marco Elizondo &
Marilyn Bechtel

Thousands of Unite Here members and their labor and community supporters took to the streets in 15 cities across the U.S. and Canada July 22 in a coordinated protest at Hyatt hotels.

Peaceful civil disobedience marked protests in several cities.

The demonstrators were expressing their outrage at the Hyatt's layoffs, slashing of workers' hours and takeaway demands in contract talks, at the same time the giant hotel chain has reported having over \$1.3 billion in available cash and its wealthy owners, the Pritzker family, took in over \$900 million from the hotel's first public offering in November 2009.

Here in Chicago - Pritzker family headquarters - hundreds of workers sat down in the street in front of the Hyatt Regency's glass tower that rises high above the Chicago River. They were cheered on by 1,000 supporters lining both sides of the drive in front of the hotel.

Twenty five sit-in participants were arrested after demonstrators blocked traffic for nearly an hour.

As onlookers cheered, the workers, with signs reading "Enough is Enough!" pinned to their backs, entered the street in single file. One demonstrator - a Hyatt Regency room attendant



-- said the last two years have been really difficult.

"Hyatt laid me off for eight months, and I have a newborn baby to support." When she finally returned, she said she found several co-workers had injured their backs because of new heavy mattresses and a heavier workload.

"What was already a hard job just got harder, and I am standing up to Hyatt, because their profits are coming back but we're still in pain."

Sit-in participant Christian Saez, a hotel

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cook, said of current contract negotiations, "We're not stupid. We may not have the formal education but we know what's going on."

In an attempt to drown out the workers' voices, hotel management sent two plain clothes security personnel to operate a sand blaster near the

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main entrance.

When reporters tried to ask the sandblasters why they were operating the machinery without actually sand-blasting anything, they were prevented from doing so by Mike Patia, who said he was responsible for hotel security.

"I have no comment about what they are doing," he said.

Standing in front of a hastily rigged banner reading, "Hyatt appreciates its associates," he said, "You'll have to remove yourself from here because this is private property."

In San Francisco, some 1,400 Unite Here Local 2 members and their labor and community supporters packed the streets surrounding upscale Union Square as they marched to the Grand Hyatt hotel.

Along with the San Francisco Labor Council and dozens of unions, many community and faith organizations were also represented, including the Progressive Jewish Alliance. "We think it's very important to support workers' rights," said

PJA member Kate Smallenburg. "We see a lot of problems with the big hotels, including not allowing workers to organize."

Once at their destination, over 150 demonstrators sat down in the middle of the street, proudly displaying their frowny-faced "Shame on Hyatt" placards.

Over 9,000 San Francisco hotel workers are among the 45,000 across North America who are in contract talks with major hotel chains.

Unite Here says that while the hotel industry nationwide is rebounding strongly from the recession and is expected to gain further in 2011 and 2012, hotels continue to squeeze workers and cut staff. Nationally, over 115,000 hotel industry jobs have been cut since 2008, including 46,000 in the first quarter of 2010. In a particularly notorious example, Hyatt last year fired the entire housekeeping staff at three Boston-area hotels, replacing them with minimum-wage contract workers.



Marco Elizondo & Marilyn Bechtel write for the People's World.

WikiLeaks and war

By PW Editorial Board

The files show that the reality of the war is in many respects "more grim than the official portrayal."

In one of the biggest leaks in U.S. military history, WikiLeaks released 92,000 classified documents about the Afghanistan war to three newspapers: The UK's Guardian, Germany's Der Spiegel and The New York Times. The military intelligence and incident reports cover a six-year period from 2004 to the end of 2009.

According to the Times, the documents "illustrate why, after the United States has spent almost \$300 billion on the war in Afghanistan, the Taliban are stronger than at any time since 2001." The files show that the reality of the war is in many respects "more grim than the official portrayal."

Conclusions from the documents include:

* Pakistan's intelligence service and military have been deeply involved in helping, even "guiding," the Taliban, even as the U.S. proclaimed Pakistan its key ally in the war and gave it billions in military aid.

* U.S. and NATO forces have killed hundreds of civilians in incidents that have not been reported.

* The U.S. covered up evidence that the Taliban are using surface-to-air missiles to shoot down helicopters and planes. These powerful weapons were first provided to Afghan "mujahadeen" by the U.S. in its war against the Soviet Union and Afghanistan's socialist government.

* A secret special forces unit has hunted down Taliban leaders for "kill or capture" without trial. Some operations have gone awry, killing civilians. In addition, the U.S. is increasingly using drone aircraft to hunt and kill Taliban targets by remote control from a base in Nevada.

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange said the real story of the material is not one "single damning revelation," but "it's war, it's one damn thing after another."

Citing the "continued small events," the continued deaths of children, insurgents, allied forces, the maimed people, the amputees, he said most of these deaths are just part of the "everyday squalor of war."

We couldn't agree more.

Oakland Port tells developers: Make good jobs a priority

By Marilyn Bechtel

Over 100 community residents and trade union activists were on hand at Port Commission headquarters here July 20 to welcome a vote they said was vital to assure quality jobs for Oakland residents in redevelopment of the massive former Oakland Army Base.

As the port commissioners prepared to vote on extending their negotiation agreement with the project's developers while a contract is finalized, the residents rallied to support a "Contract with the Community: Good Jobs for Oaklanders," put forward by the community-labor Revive Oakland! Coalition. Among their demands: local hire requirements for both short-term and long-term jobs, community-based job training and placement programs, and a commitment to quality, family-supporting jobs.

In a conversation before the rally, Shirley Burnell of the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment spoke of soaring unemployment among African American youth in West Oakland neighborhoods bordering the redevelopment project, and the sad history of other major development projects bringing workers in from other areas instead of hiring workers from Oakland.

"I hope that within this contract, there will be a requirement that Oakland is hired first," she said. "We also want to make sure Oaklanders have been trained for these jobs, so they can go right in when things are up and ready to run."

Also among rally participants was Ida, a Unite Here! member who works at an Oakland Airport food concession. "What the port needs to do is to give Oaklanders a fair chance at getting jobs, and let these workers also be unionized, like I am," she said.

As some Revive Oakland! members made their way into the Port Commission's hearing room, others gathered in an adjacent hall, where



young and older workers shared their stories of searching for employment when job-seekers far outnumber available positions.

During the hearing, coalition members voiced their hopes for the redevelopment project, and Burnell presented commissioners with hundreds of postcards signed by residents of hard-hit city neighborhoods, urging the port to support a good-jobs contract.

In the end, the commissioners agreed to extend the negotiation agreement beyond its scheduled Aug. 1 expiration. The port's extension will contain provisions to help ensure the thousands of jobs created by the redevelopment will be quality jobs for Oakland residents.

"The good news is that the port and the developers have heard us, loud and clear, that Oakland needs to be a part of this project," coalition spokesperson Kate O'Hara told the group as they gathered outside after the vote. "We are not there yet, but we are on the road," she said, as participants vowed to stay engaged with the process until the developers sign a good-jobs contract.

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Steel union rallies

By Rick Nagin

Twelve striking Mississippi steelworkers and over 100 supporters held a spirited rally at the corporate headquarters of Omnova Solutions in Fairlawn, Ohio, demanding the company return to the bargaining table and negotiate a new contract.

Its 174 employees, members of USW Local 748L, in Columbus, MS, walked out May 21 after one bargaining session.

We'll stay out as long as we have to," said Ronald Crowe, 38-year employee in the plant's ink department. "We've had practically no wage increase in the past four contracts. They want to take away everything we've won since 1992."

Crowe described Tob Coss, the plant's manager who came in a year and a half ago as "a union buster."

A delegation was turned away by security guards when it attempted to present a letter to CEO Kevin McMullen "calling on you and your local bargaining committee to come back to the table and engage in meaningful negotiations."

Mattie Andrews, a 32-year employee and truck driver, said McMullen was "hiding" in the building. "His salary is \$3 million and he wants to cut our pay," she said.

"They won't talk to us," said Dave McCall, director of the union in Ohio. "So maybe we'll talk to their investors. Maybe we'll talk to their customers."

In the past the company has had major contracts with Holiday Inns and casinos in Las Vegas.

Local Vice President Gene Gore voiced deep appreciation for the support he received in Ohio.

Trabajar en el campo

Por Al Rojas

Habiendo trabajado a comienzos de los años 1960 junto a los braceros en la industria de producción de vegetales en Oxnard, Calif., entendí los problemas involucrados en el contrato de mano de obra extranjera entonces plasmada en el Programa Bracero.

Recientemente, Arturo Rodríguez, presidente de la UFW, fue invitado para aparecer en el programa de Comedy Central, "The Colbert Report," para elentar a los trabajadores estadounidenses a tomar trabajos agrícolas.

Mediante la campaña de la UFW "Toma Nuestros Trabajos", el sindicato aparece apoyando la propuesta de ley federal hecha por la UFW llamada "AgJobs".

En esencia, la propuesta Ag-Jobs permitirá el reclutamiento de trabajadores extranjeros en las comunidades de México, Tailandia y Vietnam para trabajar en los campos de Estados Unidos como "trabajadores huéspedes".

Al aparecer apoyando el programa AgJobs rónicamente la UFW está tomando un papel contradictorio, ser un sindicato en defensa de los derechos de los trabajadores del campo y ahora actuando como agente de reclutamiento de trabajadores agrícolas extranjeros para las corporaciones estadounidenses de la agroindustria.

No se trata aquí de hablar de la necesidad de una ley de inmigración integral; el problema es que al mismo tiempo que el desempleo en el Valle Central de California se estima entre

el 18 y el 21% y hay un estimado de 10 millones de inmigrantes indocumentados que ya viven en Estados Unidos, es una completa farsa engañar al público promoviendo y empujando la importación de mano de obra barata mediante el Programa de Trabajadores Huéspedes.

Lo que necesitamos son salarios y condiciones de trabajo decentes y una reforma de inmigración humana.

Un excelente ejemplo es la propuesta de Ley 1121 que permite a los trabajadores agrícolas ganar horas extras cuando se trabaja más de ocho horas por día o más de 40 horas por semana.

Las mismas corporaciones agrícolas que están a favor del Programa de Trabajadores Huéspedes testificaron contra esa propuesta de ley, mientras que por otro lado continúan haciendo que sus trabajadores trabajen horas extras (10 horas por día) o más de 60 horas por semana. Las corporaciones agrícolas han testificado y argumentado que "la agricultura es única", en otras palabras, trabajadores agrícolas, que en su mayoría son mexicanos y otra gente de color, pueden ser tratados con indiferencia.

El verdadero problema está en salarios decentes, beneficios, seguridad y protección laboral, y el derecho a organizarse. No más Programa de Trabajadores Huéspedes que explotan a trabajadores que no tienen libertad de organización y que están completamente en las manos de los empleadores que tienen la libertad de despedir a su gusto.

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