



Everybody's Got a Right!

The Betrayal of Justice in the American Workplace

FROM COAST TO COAST and all points in between, 42 million workers who don't have unions say they want to join one. Maria Perla, a housekeeper at the Embassy Suites San Rafael in the Bay Area for 11 years, sees the advantages of union representation. Each day at the hotel operated and partially owned by the Hilton Hotel Corporation, she slaves to complete an impossible workload, suffers the torment of cruel managers, and struggles to make ends meet on her meager salary. Meanwhile, unionized workers at another Hilton establishment across the bridge in San Francisco are paid more and work under much better conditions.

On the other side of the country, Gerrardo Serrano, a construction worker living in Washington, DC, is learning first hand about the power of unions to improve working conditions. Gerrardo was laid off for union organizing at ACECO, a company where he'd witnessed 2 accidental deaths; and, received little compensation and no benefits or time off despite the extremely hazardous working conditions. Today, Gerrardo works at a union job and feels at peace.

Immigrants are particularly vulnerable to unscrupulous employers who use the threat of deportation to force workers to accept poor and unsafe work conditions, low wages, and little to no benefits. But everybody's got a right—a universal human right—to fair wages and a safe working environment. Maria and Gerrardo, Salvadoran immigrants who came to this country to make a better life for their families, share their stories of why fighting for a union is worth the struggle.

MARIA'S STORY

A Union Is Worth the Risk of Organizing

I clean 18 suites by myself each day in 6 hours nonstop. They are large suites with two rooms. I'm put under a lot of pressure to finish all of the work in the time allotted. We're constantly running around to try and finish. I have only fifteen to twenty minutes to clean each suite all by myself. When I get home, my whole body hurts and my head feels like it's going to explode.

They start housekeepers at \$7 an hour. I have medical insurance and pay \$58 a month just for myself. I have no insurance for my son. I get PTO, paid time off, which is one week that includes sick leave and vacation.

Housekeepers at the Hilton in San Francisco have a union and they have to clean a lot less rooms, get paid more, and the conditions are a lot better.

What I make isn't enough to support me and my son. It's just a little bit of money. That's why I have to work another job. I come home from Embassy Suites for a couple of hours and then go and clean at a Wells Fargo bank at night.



Housekeepers at the Hilton in San Francisco have a union and they have to clean a lot less rooms, get paid more, and the conditions are a lot better. Besides having to clean less, they don't have to work under such pressure. They have job security and they don't pay anything for health insurance.

We decided to form a union and began working with HERE Local 2850 to have better working conditions, respect, more money and less work. The company started threatening people in the beginning of the organizing. They were threatening them by saying that the social security numbers they gave didn't match the ones on record at the Social Security Administration. People had been working there for many,

many years and no one had ever said a word about social security numbers as long as people worked. Now, all of the sudden, they were asking for their papers and told them if their social security numbers didn't match they would lose their jobs. That was the threat. Everyone there was an immigrant and they felt discriminated against. This type of threat is very scary for immigrants because people are scared of being deported.

HERE Local 2850 invited me to be on the Immigrant Worker Freedom Ride to represent immigrants in this country who are being treated unfairly. It was so incredible to travel across every state and see immigrant workers with the same problems. I was amazed by the support that was out there. In Washington, DC and New York I just cried and cried because of how many people came to support us.

I was scared of the threats, but not any more. I'm willing to take the risk. It's worth it. Changes have already been made and my eyes were opened. Since the organizing started, the housekeeping department got a twenty-five cent raise. They've been giving people cappuccinos, cookies, even a trip to Marine World! A lot of people have been bribed, but people on the union organizing committee say, "Thank you very much, but I'll keep organizing."

GERRARDO'S STORY

Now Working in Peace on Union Job

The reason we decided to form a union with the Laborers (LIUNA) was because we weren't getting any raises and we didn't have any protection. If somebody got hurt on the job and we went to a medical center or such, he would lose his job. So that's why we decided to form the union.

The owners of the company started harassing us because of our immigration status. Everybody is different—some are documented, some are undocumented, some are residents and some are just on visas. Because of their immigration status, the company was beginning to pressure them.

After we had the election to be represented by the union, there was pressure against the people who were helping to organize and get the union in. The pressure was directed at every union supporter, and pretty soon they were laying us off one at a time.

I was laid off a week after the election. They took the vote and the company is winning because they got rid of all the union-

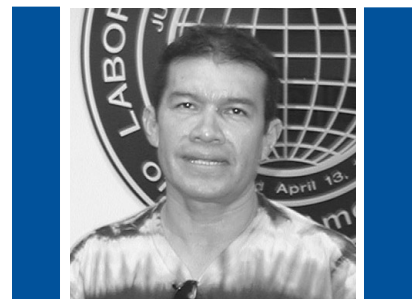
The Facts on Why Workers Want Unions

- Unions raise wages of unionized workers by roughly 20%; and, raise compensation—including both wages and benefits—by about 28%.
- While 83% of unionized workers have employer-provided health insurance, only 62% of non-unionized workers have such a benefit. Unionized workers are 28.2% more likely than comparable non-union workers to be covered by employer-provided health insurance.
- Employers with unionized workforces also provide better health insurance. They pay an 11.1% larger share of single worker coverage and a 15.6% greater share of family coverage. Moreover, deductibles are \$54 (18%) less for unionized workers.
- Unionized workers are 24.4% more likely to receive health insurance coverage in their retirement.
- Similarly, 71.9% of unionized workers have pensions provided by their employers, while only 43.8% of non-union workers do. Thus, unionized workers are 53.9% more likely to have pension coverage.

supporting workers. The owners said if you support the union, you can't come back again.

I just started at a union job and it feels better. The relation-

ship between the supervisor and worker is different. Both are people—the same. I feel good. I've got dental, medical, medicine, vision, chiropractic, and retirement benefits. The working conditions are better and I make more money. I'm working in peace. And that's better for me and my family.



Fact Sources: Richard B. Freeman and Joel Rogers, *What Workers Want*, ILR Press 1999, with updated figures from authors June 2002; "How Unions Help All Workers," by Lawrence Mishel and Matthew Walters, Economic Policy Institute (2003).