

# WALKING THE WALK

## Allies in Action Supporting Workers

The National Council of La Raza, the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States, welcomes thousands of participants to its annual conferences, generating millions of dollars in business for area hotels, restaurants, and the surrounding local economies.

In 2005, with planning for its 2006 Annual Conference at a critical point, NCLR became aware of a dispute between the Los Angeles trade group representing hotels and UNITE HERE, the union representing hotel workers.

This conflict led to a series of internal discussions at NCLR. It could not undercut the workers, but how much would it cost to move? Would members be inconvenienced? Would there be logistical concerns? After thoughtful discussions and deliberation with board and staff, NCLR President and CEO Janet Murguia made the decision: **the National Council of La Raza had to support the workers.**

In May 2005, NCLR announced that it would not hold its 2006 Annual Conference in Los Angeles because the workers needed its help. Murguia explained, "It would be inconsistent with who we are and what we do as an organization to hold a large event in the city while these negotiations are under way. We hope that these labor issues will be resolved in a way which serves the needs of the workers and the industry. When that happens, we'd be delighted to investigate the possibility of returning."

American Rights at Work applauds and supports the bold stand the National Council of La Raza, the Sierra Club, and other organizations and businesses have taken to stand in solidarity with the hard-working men and women in the hospitality industry.

**NCLR**  
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA

Photo by David Bacon

### ABOUT AMERICAN RIGHTS AT WORK

American Rights at Work is a national, nonprofit workers' rights advocacy organization. We envision a nation where the freedom of workers to organize unions and bargain collectively with employers is guaranteed and promoted.



[www.americanrightsatwork.org](http://www.americanrightsatwork.org)

### HOW YOU CAN HELP SUPPORT WORKERS

- Before you travel or plan a meeting, check out [www.hotellaboradvisor.info](http://www.hotellaboradvisor.info).
- Visit [www.hotelworkersrising.org](http://www.hotelworkersrising.org) to sign up for campaign information and updates.
- Go to [www.americanrightsatwork.org](http://www.americanrightsatwork.org), and join the American Rights at Work email activist list to receive ongoing updates and resources to help you advocate for workers' rights!
- **Co-host a briefing** about the campaign or **invite workers** to speak at your event. For more information, contact Jane Norman at 202-822-2127 x112 or [jnorman@americanrightsatwork.org](mailto:jnorman@americanrightsatwork.org).
- **Join INMEX**, the Informed Meetings Exchange, that will assist in planning large events, or **use contract language** that allows you to support workers without penalty in the event of a labor dispute. For more information, contact Neal Kwatra at 202-661-3677 or [nkwatra@unitehere.org](mailto:nkwatra@unitehere.org).

Help all workers get fair wages and a voice at work!

## Why Hotel Workers Are Rising!

*Do you travel for work?*

*Do you use hotels for meetings or briefings?*

*Does your organization hold an annual conference, fundraising dinner, or awards ceremony?*

If the answer is ‘yes’—then you already know about the multiple factors that go into the selection of a site: cost, location, amenities, etc.

Yet organizations and businesses are increasingly basing their decisions on another consideration: How do the hotels treat their workers?

Through their membership in UNITE HERE, tens of thousands of employees in the hospitality sector have gained family-supporting wages, benefits, safer and healthier workplaces, and a voice on the job.

Unfortunately, there are still many hospitality workers who do not have the benefits and protections of being a union member—and even workers with union representation have to fight to preserve the gains they have earned. That’s why hotel workers across North America are rising together, and that is why UNITE HERE and American Rights at Work are gathering support for their cause.

### About the Hotel Workers Rising Campaign



**The UNITE HERE Hotel Workers Rising campaign represents an effort to empower thousands of hotel workers—largely immigrants and women of color—in cities across North America as they work to improve their jobs and secure better lives for themselves and their families.**

## Why Do Hospitality Workers Want a Union?

### HUGE PAY GAPS

Of all the lowest paying job categories, more than one third are in hotels and restaurants.<sup>1</sup> In cities where UNITE HERE represents a large percentage of hotel workers, wages are higher:

- In cities where almost all the hotels are union, wages average \$15/hour—they are middle class, family supporting jobs.
- But in cities where very few hotels are union, wages average only \$7/hour—well below the poverty line.<sup>2</sup>

### NOT JUST WAGES

- In the private sector, 92 percent of union workers have jobs providing access to medical care benefits, compared with only 68 percent of non-union workers.<sup>3</sup>
- Hotel workers are 48 percent more likely to be injured on the job than typical service workers.<sup>4</sup>
- High room quotas force housekeepers to speed up their work, skip breaks, work off the clock, and risk injury.

**“We are striving to make a better life for ourselves and our families. We should not have to work two jobs, sacrifice our health and still raise our children in poverty.”**

— Zeleda Davis, housekeeper

### RESPECT AND DIGNITY

While hotel workers deserve family-supporting wages and a shot at the American Dream, they also, like every other working person, want a voice on the job.

- “We can question management without fear of losing our job.” — *Jody Payne, banquet server at a union hotel*
- “If workers have a decent standard of living, they will give back to their communities. Instead of working three jobs, parents can do homework with their kids at night.” — *Angela Reid, cook & banquet server at a non-union hotel*

<sup>1</sup> John E. Buckley, “Ranking of full-time occupations, by earnings, 2000,” Bureau of Labor Statistics Monthly Labor Review, Mar. 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Based on UNITE HERE analysis of housekeeping wages in collective bargaining agreements. See UNITE HERE for more information about this data.

<sup>3</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employee Benefits in Private Industry,” Mar. 2005, Aug. 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, average figures for 2003 and 2004. For more information, see UNITE HERE, *Creating Luxury, Enduring Pain: How Hotel Work is Hurting Housekeepers*, Apr. 2006.