HOTEL WORKERS RISING! lifting one another above the poverty line

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LAX Hilton Fires Two Workers Who Fasted for a Living Wage

Union Says Firings Are Another Example of Tactics Used by Employers to Intimidate Workers Who Exercise Their Rights to Form a Union

Los Angeles— Michael Kaib, a server at the LAX Hilton, and Alicia Melgarejo, a housekeeper at the LAX Hilton, were two of the 16 workers who fasted for a living wage in December of last year. On March 13, both workers were fired by the LAX Hilton.

The workers believe they were targeted because of their union organizing efforts and their active support of the city's living wage law for Century hotel workers. Both workers had taken active roles in the two-year-old union organizing drive at the hotel, taking part in picket lines and press conferences outside of the hotel, in plain view of management and security guards. Alicia and Michael were also vocal supporters of the city's Century Boulevard hotel living wage ordinance, fasting for seven days in December of last year in support of a living wage for hotel workers on Century Boulevard.

Michael Kaib has worked as a server at the LAX Hilton for two years, and has never been disciplined on the job. Kaib was accused of hitting a security officer with a picket sign while on a picket line outside of the hotel on March 4 of this year. Dozens of workers walked the picket line with Kaib on that day, some of whom witnessed the security guard push his way into the picket line. UNITE HETE has not been able to identify a single worker who witnessed Kaib hitting a security officer.

After Kaib began his shift, six police officers in plain view of other employees escorted him outside and then proceeded to arrest him. "This was a show of force by hotel management. To call the police and have me escorted by six police officers from the hotel and then arrested is an attempt by the hotel to intimidate my coworkers so that they will think twice before continuing to be actively involved in union organizing efforts," said Kaib.

Alicia Melgarejo has worked as a housekeeper at the LAX Hilton for almost eight years. She is a single mother who supports her 14-year-old daughter on a single income.

Despite a clean work record and the fact that she has never been disciplined in her eight years at the hotel, she was fired after management accused her of stealing towels.

Melgarejo vehemently denies these accusations and asked management to show her the video they claim to have of her stealing, but despite her request management refused to show her any proof. Now that she has been fired she worries about providing for her teenage daughter. "I have been a good employee at this hotel for many years, and have a clean work record and have never been disciplined in the past. That they would fire me for something I didn't do, even though I have given years of my life to making this hotel successful, is not right. Now I don't know how I am going to provide for my daughter," she said.

Maria Elena Durazo, Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, explains that the firings are business as usual by employers in response to union organizing drives. "Employers use these types of tactics every day to try and instill fear in their workers so they don't exercise the rights they have under federal labor law. It is deplorable that the LAX Hilton has chosen a path of intimidation and harassment; these types of tactics have no place in a free and fair society," said Durazo.

Labor rights activists claim that this is another example of why labor laws need to be strengthened, so as to better protect employees from these types of tactics. American Rights at Work, a labor rights advocacy group, reports on its website that 30% of employers fire pro-union workers during union organizing drives.