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## **Westin LAX Workers Win Right To Display Support For Union Century Boulevard Hotel Giant Concedes in Face of Federal Charges**

### **Hotel Has Also Opposed Landmark Law Requiring Living Wages for LAX Hotel Workers**

Los Angeles—In a major concession, one of the city’s largest hotels has agreed to allow workers to wear union buttons, and to pay back wages to dozens of workers suspended for wearing buttons on three different occasions over the past year.

The agreement between the Westin LAX and UNITE HERE Local 11 was reached just days before a scheduled National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) hearing on federal charges filed against the hotel for denying workers the right to display support for the union. As part of the agreement, the Westin LAX will also post a notice informing workers of their right to wear union buttons. In exchange, the union has asked the General Counsel of the NLRB to withdraw its complaint.

The Westin is the second-largest hotel on Century Boulevard, where workers have been fighting for both a law requiring living wages and the right to organize without interference. The organizing drive of Century Boulevard hotels is one of the largest in the North American hospitality industry, potentially affecting some 3,500 workers.

“This is an important victory for hundreds of workers who risked their wages and their job security to stand up for a basic American right,” said Tom Walsh, Secretary Treasurer of UNITE HERE. “While we are hopeful that the Westin LAX will honor its commitment, there is still a long way to go before Westin workers and workers at other Century Boulevard hotels enjoy the right to organize without interference by their employers.”

On May 9, 34 workers were suspended by the Westin LAX when they arrived at work wearing UNITE HERE buttons. Several of the workers went immediately to City Hall to inform City Councilmembers of the hotel’s action. In response, several councilmembers including Bill Rosendahl, Janice Hahn, Jose Huizar and Ed Reyes placed calls to Westin management.

That afternoon, workers from the Westin and other Century Boulevard hotels were joined by religious and community leaders, who demanded that the workers be allowed to return to their jobs and permitted to display support for the union. The next morning, the workers successfully returned to their jobs. The following day, the hotel conceded that workers had the right to wear union buttons.

“We know that we have to take risks to improve our lives and those of our families and communities,” said Alma Romero, one of the workers suspended last week, and one of a

dozen Century Boulevard hotel workers who participated in a fast last December in support of a living wage. “But we believe that, with the support of the community and the public, we will achieve our dreams.”

Last week’s suspensions were preceded by two previous sets of suspensions by the Westin LAX in 2006 over the same issue of workers wearing union buttons. Following the filing of federal charges by UNITE HERE, the NLRB’s General Counsel issued a complaint against the hotel.

The Westin LAX has also been at the center of a yearlong battle to win a law mandating living wages for Century Boulevard hotel workers. In March, the hotel joined six other hotels near LAX in a lawsuit against an ordinance passed by the City Council that would have required Century Boulevard hotels to abide by the city’s living wage law. A judge has issued a ruling preventing the law from taking effect.

Hotels near LAX enjoy the highest occupancy rates in Los Angeles, yet many workers in these hotels still live in poverty. Hotel workers in the LAX/PCH submarket earn 20% less than their counterparts in downtown L.A. Average annual earnings for LAX/PCH workers is \$20,328 – barely above the federal \$20,000 federal poverty threshold for a family of four. Some workers qualify for multiple government assistance programs.

The nearby communities of Lennox, Inglewood and Hawthorne, where a large number of these workers live, suffer high rates of poverty, crime and overcrowding. One in four residents in these communities lives below the federal poverty line, a measure of extreme poverty, while more than 40% of children come from poor households. Median household income is 25% lower than in L.A. County as a whole.

For the past 15 months, a coalition of community, civic and faith leaders has engaged in an effort to address conditions for LAX hotel workers and nearby communities. In February the coalition presented thousands of signatures to City Council asking for a comprehensive plan for the area. In April, a blue ribbon commission headed by former Councilmember Ruth Galanter released a report calling for a major effort by city, industry and community leaders to address conditions for workers, communities and the hotel industry near LAX. In December, community leaders from across the city supported hotel workers during a seven-day fast, joining them for daily actions on Century Boulevard.

“The continuing effort by LAX hotels to try and deny their workers a law requiring a living wage as well as the right to organize without interference has far-reaching consequences for thousands of men and women, their families and the communities in which they live,” said Rev. Altagracia Perez of Holy Faith Episcopal Church in Inglewood. “These hotels have chosen to spend huge amounts of money to try and deny their own workers a better life.”