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Hotel workers strike at the Hyatt Regency Chicago

Hundreds of religious leaders to join workers on the picket line at world's largest Hyatt

(Chicago, IL) – After 20 months of negotiations, housekeepers, dishwashers, bellmen and other hotel workers are going on strike at the Hyatt Regency Chicago, the largest Hyatt property in the world. Hyatt, a company run by billionaires, wants to outsource work and impose dangerous working conditions on housekeepers. Workers also say they want to be able to show solidarity with Hyatt workers elsewhere. Under Hyatt's current terms, they would be forced to waive their right to do so.

Hundreds of religious leaders affiliated with Interfaith Worker Justice will be joining workers on the picket lines today. Rabbis and other religious leaders have played a key role nationally in building support for Hyatt workers across North America. Most notably in Chicago, religious leaders have led delegations to top Hyatt executives at Hyatt Global Headquarters in December 2009 and at Hyatt's first annual shareholders meeting in Chicago in June 2010.

Nationwide, Hyatt has sparked controversy for its abuse of housekeepers and for replacing long-term employees with workers from temporary agencies at far lower rates of pay. As a result, Hyatt has faced numerous strikes and dozens of demonstrations nationally in recent years.

"Our bodies hurt, but Hyatt is ignoring us. We will no longer suffer in silence," says Cecilia Leiva, a housekeeper at the Hyatt Regency Chicago.

Academic studies have shown housekeeping to be dangerous work that can lead to debilitating injuries. A landmark study of 50 hotels published in the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* in 2010 found that housekeepers working at Hyatt hotels had the highest rate of injury for housekeepers among the five major hotel companies included in the study.

"Hyatt is one of the most abusive hotels in their treatment of housekeepers and has the worst record on subcontracting," says Henry Tamarin, the President of UNITE HERE Local 1. "They refuse to budge on these important issues, and now workers have hit a boiling point."

Nationwide, the hotel industry is rebounding faster and stronger than expected, with a hearty rebound projected in 2011 and 2012. Hyatt has more cash on hand than most of the major hotel operators combined, and yet across North America Hyatt continues to lock workers into poverty.

UNITE HERE Local 1 represents over 700 workers at the Hyatt Regency, the 2019-room hotel on Wacker Drive in downtown Chicago. Contracts for Hyatt workers expired on August 31, 2009. In May 2010, Hyatt Regency workers—led by more than 100 housekeepers—walked off the job, protesting worsening working conditions in housekeeping after a major hotel renovation. In September 2010, workers at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare in Rosemont, Ill. carried out a one-day strike. The strike will last from 4:00am-8:00pm Monday.

UNITE HERE Local 1, Chicago's hospitality workers union, represents over 15,000 hotel and food service workers in Chicago and casino workers in Northwest Indiana.

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