

In the Democratic Spirit, Let Workers Decide How to Unionize

■ **Labor:** The convention in L.A. spotlights a dispute at one of the hotels where some delegates plan to stay.

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"I hurt my back and could not do the room quota. When I told the manager that I could not do the 15 rooms, she told me that it was 15 rooms or I should go home [without pay]. Then they put me to work on 'light duty,' but they had me scrubbing stairs and baseboards, which hurt my back even more. She told me that if I felt any pain, that she would bring me Ben-Gay."—**Edith Garcia, housekeeper, Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel.**

Next week, the Democratic National Convention and its 5,000 delegates come to town. Each day, convention delegates

will leave their hotel rooms to go about the business of nominating Al Gore as the Democratic nominee for president of the United States. And each day, as they do every working day, women like Edith Garcia will make beds, scrub bathrooms and perform countless other tasks, large and small, to make the hotel's guests feel welcome and comfortable when they return to their rooms at night.

Tourism, L.A.'s third-largest industry, has become enormously successful. Yet while hotel room rates are up 45% since 1992, tourism industry workers in the Los Angeles area—the majority of whom are Latino immigrants—are still among the lowest paid. Indeed, the Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel can rent a room for one night for more than 50 times what it pays a housekeeper like Edith Garcia to clean it. (Edith is paid roughly \$5 to clean each room; a room at Loews can rent for \$250 a night or more.)

Garcia has worked at the Loews for 11 years, and for most of that time, her income has stayed close to the federal poverty level. Loews Corp., by contrast, is a large

conglomerate with revenue exceeding \$4 billion in 1999. It also owns an oil company, Diamond Offshore Drilling, and a tobacco company, Lorillard.

How can Garcia make her voice heard by a company as big as Loews? As Democrats gather in L.A., we will be reminding the na-

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tion that unions can and do give workers a voice on the job and the power to lift their families out of poverty. It's no surprise that in Los Angeles, low-wage workers like Garcia are looking to unions to improve their lives and provide a better future for their children.

Yet when Garcia and her co-workers told their managers they wanted a union, the Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel re-

sponded by hiring anti-union consultants and a new security firm, which employees viewed as an attempt to discourage them from voting for a union. Employees have said that Loews interrogated some workers and placed them under surveillance.

Unfortunately, the way Loews has chosen to fight their employees' desire for a union is all too common. There is another way, however. For example, at the Staples Center—host to the Democratic National Convention—employers agreed to allow employees to vote for a union using the confidential "card check" process—that is, Staples remained neutral and did not interfere with food-service workers exercising their right to organize a union. When a majority of workers signed union authorization cards, the employers recognized their choice of a union. Now several hundred working families have a contract that guarantees them good wages, free family health insurance and a voice on the job.

This confidential card-check process has become the standard for tourism industry employers in Los Angeles. Employers at LAX and TrizecHahn's Hollywood Holiday

Inn, for example, have agreed to that process.

Loews and other nonunion hotels should follow their lead and agree to the same confidential card-check process. There cannot be a free and fair election in an environment polluted by aggressive anti-union tactics.

That's why we're joining community and religious leaders and elected officials at all levels of government in calling on the Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel to agree in writing to the following principles:

- To remain neutral and not interfere with workers exercising their right to organize a union.
- To recognize the workers' choice of a union if a majority sign union authorization cards.

Intimidation and harassment do not belong in the workplace or anywhere else in a democratic society. Garcia and her fellow workers deserve some respect.

The authors are U.S. Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-Los Angeles), state Assemblywoman Sheila Kuehl (D-Santa Monica) and Santa Monica Mayor Ken Genser.