



Low-wage workers leading the way to poverty's end.

**EMBARGOED UNTIL MARCH 6, 2009 AT 10 AM**

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## **Workers Share Stories of Mistreatment and Announce Three Worst Employers at the Inner Harbor**

(BALTIMORE) On March 6, 2009 the United Workers will hold a press conference to expose economic human rights violations at Baltimore's Inner Harbor and to put the three worst employers on notice. One of the three employers will receive specific demands from workers to improve working conditions and pay workers a living wage. The specific demands will be delivered to the first target of the Human Rights Zone campaign after workers hold a large scale march and protest on April 18, 2009.

When: Press Conference is on March 6, 2009 at 10:00 AM

Where: McKeldin Fountain (Intersection of Pratt and Light Streets)

Workers at the press conference will share stories of being mistreated and paid poverty wages by employers at the Inner Harbor. Workers will then deliver a poster-sized "notice" to each of the three worst employers. The United Workers will also share results of a survey of 147 Harbor workers conducted in the months following the October 25, 2008 launch of the Human Rights Zone Campaign.

Organizers and low-wage workers conducted the two-part survey by meeting with Harbor workers as workers arrived to and left from shifts and during breaks. A longer form survey was also conducted in homes of workers through. (Copies of actual survey results can be made available to reporters by request, although some workers have requested that their names not be publicly released to prevent harassment or intimidation by their employer.) Summary of survey findings is attached.

The following companies have been identified by Harbor workers as the worst three employers at the Inner Harbor and will one of the three worst will be announced as the first target of a large scale worker-led and consumer supported campaign starting after the Human Rights Zone March on April 18, 2009.

- Cheesecake Factory
- M&S Gill
- Phillips

Following the press conference, workers will offer to meet with the three employers put on notice in to address worker concerns. Based on these talks, and the nature of past violations and current working conditions, the worst-of-the-worst employer will be determined and then announced on April 18, 2009. The announcement will be made at the front steps of the first target and specific demands will be

announced following the Human Rights Zone March through the downtown area.

The United Workers is an economic human rights organization founded by homeless day laborers at an abandoned firehouse-turned-shelter. The organization announced Baltimore's touristy Inner Harbor to be a "Human Rights Zone" on October 25, 2008, with the aim of expanding the economic human rights of health care, education and work with dignity to every low-wage worker at Baltimore's Inner Harbor.

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## **Survey of Working Conditions at the Inner Harbor SUMMARY OF RESULTS**

Workers at Baltimore's Inner Harbor have declared the Inner Harbor a “Human Rights Zone” and are demanding that the rights to health care, education and work with dignity be respected.

Since October 25, 2008, the United Workers has been talking to workers about working conditions to uncover the worst employers, who have put on notice to improve how workers are treated or become the first target of the Human Rights Zone Campaign.

In surveys of 147 Harbor workers since launching the campaign, the United Workers has documented the following incidents at M&S Grill, Philips and the Cheesecake Factory.

Please note that while names have been removed from this summary, the United Workers can make available survey documentation to reporters and has contact information for all participants.

Reporters may request to speak to participants. Some participants may request to remain unnamed due to fear of intimidation and harassment by their employer.

### **Human Right to Work with Dignity**

#### **Poverty wages**

- “I come home really tired after a day at work, and when I see my check I get depressed. How is possible that I can't get a house after working so hard for so many years?” said a cook at Cheesecake who has been paid a poverty wage for more than a decade at the same job.
- “I don't make enough money with just one job and sometimes I have worked over 24 hours straight between three jobs at three different employers,” said a worker who works at M&S Grill.
- “They punched me out of the time clock. I will be working and they punch me out. I was cleaning the dishes and the manager would ask 'how long you got' and then tells me to hurry up. But when I go to punch out, they had already punched me out. They took 10-20 min from me. This happened to me four times. It makes me want another job, but I don't have time because of the kids and work. If I try and leave when they clock me out, they tell me I can't. They say, 'don't bother coming back' or 'we are going to write you up,’” said a worker at Phillips.

## Harassment

- “Managers touched women's behinds and when women workers bent over, the managers would pretend to hump the women as they walked by,” said a prep cook at the Cheesecake Factory.
- “I have heard that in order to get good days and good shifts, servers have to do this manager sexual favors. A server quit because this manager came back after a leave of absence. The server said she was praying to God that the manager would not come back. She told me one day that he asked her for 'favors' to switch to getting better shifts,” said a Harbor worker.

## Mistreatment

- “From when I started my shift to it was over I couldn't even eat or take a break. If they saw me eating the boss would let me have it. I could barely even go to the bathroom,” said a cook at Cheesecake Factory who started at \$7.00 an hour and who works up 10 hours without a break.
- “On the original schedule I was scheduled. On a Saturday I asked for the day off for a death in the family. I went in to work the next day and found out I was not scheduled anymore. I had X's for all seven days where there should of been hours. I wasn't put for any hours and was fired for going to the funeral.” said a former Dishwasher at Phillips who was recently fired without notice.
- “They make us buy a special red cup just to drink water or soda. If I forget the cup, they make you buy another. You can't drink out of anything else, even a glass of water,” said a worker at Phillips.

## Human Right to Health Care

- Most workers report that they cannot afford health care, even when a plan is offered by the employer.
- One employee who has worked for Cheesecake Factory for more than nine year recently lost his health care for a six month period because his hours were cut to three hours below what's required to get health care.
- “I remember a co-worker threw up on the subway. They told him to take a Pepto Bismal and come in to work. He started throwing up. He asked to go home. They said for him to drink some ginger-ale. He ended up just leaving and they wrote him up the next day,” said a Cheesecake Factory kitchen worker.
- “You think you have the same days off and then they just change it. I have to take care of three kids who need to have doctors visits, and there were times when my kids missed doctors visits because they would change my schedule without notice,” said a former Phillips worker who was paid \$4,000 a year less than a living wage.
- “I complained that I was sick, a stomach virus. I kept throwing up every time I ate something. I called eight hours before my shift. Then three hours before my shift and the manager said you got to bring your ass in. When I got in, I was throwing up on the deck outside. They finally said I could go home,” said a worker at Phillips.
- “I sprained my ankle. I slipped on the floor on a patch of oil or butter. A couple people saw it. It was really bad that night so I went to the hospital. The manager didn't give me time to get better, they just had me working on my sprained ankle,” said a former worker at Phillips.
- “By the time I was eligible for benefits, I was no longer a full-time employee. Health care is

expensive, but I would have got it. I can't afford not to. The week I got laid off, I found out I had pneumonia in my lungs and all these pains in my side and went to the hospital. I have a \$660 hospital bill and I owe another \$410 for the ambulance," said a worker at Phillips.

- "I cut my thumb at work one time and they had me sit out for half-hour. It kept bleeding so they sent me to the hospital. They paid for my hack [not even for a taxi fare], but not the doctor. I still owe \$410 for the doctor. I told them it was \$410. They said I was all right, it was just a scratch. I have six stitches. By now it's probably \$600," said a worker at one of the three worst employers.
- "Last year I had a hair line fracture in my wrist. I got a brace from Wal-Mart, but I can't wear it at work because I can't carry the tray out with the brace. Last year I had a lot of pain in my wrist so I went to the hospital. The doctor told me he needed to do some more tests, but I didn't want to stay because it was too expensive. The bill was \$500-\$600 for being in the hospital for 6 hours to get my wrist checked out. The brace I bought was from Wal-mart is \$23," said a worker at Phillips.
- "Last year I spent \$600 on healthcare. I had walking pneumonia while I was working at M&S. My chest was hurting, so I went to the hospital. I was out for four days. There aren't any paid sick days" said an M&S Grill cook.

## **Human Right to Education**

- "I asked to be a bar back, but they said no because I needed training but they wouldn't give it," said a dishwasher at Cheesecake Factory who has worked over three years and is paid a wage that is \$5,000 a year less than a living wage.
- Most workers report wanting to get more training in hospitality and culinary skills, but employers don't offer any of this training to workers.
- Most workers report having less than a high school diploma, and want to get higher education if they had the resources and time.