

Press Release

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For Immediate Release:

Rallies Begin Today in Front of Hilton Hotels in San Juan

Hundreds of hotel workers of the Caribe Hilton, Condado Plaza and the El San Juan hotels will be holding a series of protests and marches December 17, 18 and 19th. These workers, who are members of Local 610 (La Gastronomica), will be holding a rally at the Condado Plaza hotel on December 17th at 5:15 pm, and will then be marching to the Radisson Ambassador hotel after the rally. They will then be holding a rally at the Caribe Hilton on December 18th at 5:15pm, and will cap off the week's activities by holding a rally at the El San Juan hotel on December 19th at 5:45pm.

Local 610 members at these hotels, who have been working without a contract for months, are protesting low wages, poor healthcare benefits, abusive and disrespectful managers, unhealthy and unsafe working conditions, and violations of federal labor law by the company. The workers at these properties are bracing themselves for what could be a long, protracted fight with one of the richest multinational corporations in the world. Blackstone, who owns the Hilton brand, also owns the Caribe Hilton and manages all three hotels. The company recently announced their Free Earning Assets Under Management totaled \$96.3 billion as of June 30, 2009, and recently posted a 2009 Q3 Economic Net Income After Taxes of \$275 million.

"These jobs used to be good jobs," said Felix Mejias, who is the President of Local 610, and a former employee of Conrad Condado Plaza Hotel. "These used to be the kind of jobs that you used to be able to raise a family on, and in most of Continental United States, Hilton and Blackstone deal with their Union workers fairly and pay them decent wages and good benefits. But over the years, this company has taken a hard line with us here in Puerto Rico. They have reduced our wages and benefits. Our working conditions have become intolerable. All the while they have amassed more wealth than almost any other company on the planet. In the last few months, as the negotiations have approached, the Company has committed many unfair labor practices in violation of our legal rights. Our members have decided that enough is enough. As far as we are concerned, the abuse in these three Hilton Hotels is over."

The rallies signify both a culmination of lengthy bargaining that has failed to produce a fair agreement, but also the beginning of more actions, pickets, and potentially a strike that could deal a crippling blow to a tourism market in San Juan that has largely avoided the global recession's affect on lodging.

While most of the world's lodging industry was reeling, San Juan reported a year-over-year occupancy rate increase of 5.6% as of October, 2009 (according to Smith Travel Research). A strike at three of the largest hotels in Condado would surely curtail the high times in San Juan's travel market.

"Do we want to go on strike? Of course not. Are we willing to go on strike? Absolutely," said Eric Enchandia, who is a Local 610 Steward and a cook at the Condado Plaza. "We will not back down. We will not be forced to work under these conditions any longer. Our industry is making a lot of money, and we, the workers at these hotels, deserve our fair share for the industry's success. Blackstone made out like bandits and continue to make obscene profits while trampling on our rights. Well, we are here to tell them that they will not be making profits off our backs any longer."

ABOUT LOCAL 610: UNITE HERE Local 610 represents more than 1,100 employees at three San Juan area hotels owned by Hilton: the Conrad Condado Plaza Hilton Hotel, the Caribe Hilton Hotel, and the El San Juan Hilton Hotel & Casino.