

INTERVIEWER...of Local 610 Gastronomic Union, UNITE HERE in Puerto Rico, Félix Mejías. Good afternoon.

FÉLIX MEJÍAS: Good Afternoon.

IN: Today these protests are going to be held, today, tomorrow, and the day after, I was hoping you would tell us specifically where you will be meeting and at what time the different demonstrations will take place.

FM: Today we will be having a demonstration in front of the Condado Plaza Hotel, starting at five pm, and shortly we will be marching to the Ambassador Hotel on Ashford Avenue. Tomorrow, Friday, after 5 pm, we will be holding another demonstration in front of the Caribe Hilton in San Juan. And on Friday ...Saturday in the afternoon, later, after 5 pm, we will be in front of the Hotel San Juan on Isla Verde. These activities are being conducted by the employees themselves, as we are currently negotiating a collective contract with the Hilton company in Puerto Rico, who, eh...has tried to polarize the hotels here in Puerto Rico and has for many years violated our rights as employees. So these activities that we are now conducting are so that we can show them that, when they come to try and negotiate with us on the 21st, 22nd, and 23rd of December, they should come ready to negotiate and acting in good faith to treat the employees with respect...since, the last time in November when we had negotiations with them, they brought us some proposals, and every time we explained something and asked them to take action, they would tell us that they did not have the authority to take that action. With us, we are going to show them that we are ready at any time to defend our rights, to fight for them, and, if we need to hit the streets, we will hit the streets, all 1,500 employees from the three hotels and 116 more including the hotel Ambassador.

IN: The hotels, which ones are they?

FM: The hotels are the Condado Plaza, the Caribe Hilton, and the San Juan Hotel, and we also include separately that we are negotiating with the Ambassador Hotel, the Ambassador itself, which we are counting on.

IN: What is it that you are demanding with this demonstration?

FM: What we are demanding from them is fair treatment. We are asking them for a medical plan that has the same type of coverage that they have at the other Hiltons that are not unionized, the same as the Hilton, since the Hilton has a good medical plan that we, all the hotels that are also Hilton, have not received. They have given us a medical plan that is not the same as what they have. The hotels why...the unionized hotels, what they say is that they are worth less than the non-unionized hotels. We have the same rights! since we work with the same rules and do the same work that they do at all the Hilton hotels, in Puerto Rico and in the United States. That is not ...[inaudible] this agency. We even have language that we had to write, this, to speak first in [inaudible] of Puerto Rico, language that the employees, among themselves [inaudible] must be understood by someone who does not speak the Spanish language. Because they even

want to give a warning, a write-up, to any employee if he or she speaks Spanish in the presence of a customer. And that [inaudible] on the island of Puerto Rico. But we also demand the same respect, with which they treat people in the United States and other companies that they want [inaudible] nothing.

IN: You said that this coming December 21 the owners of the Caribe Hilton Hotel are expected to arrive in Puerto Rico to negotiate with the employees. What do you think will happen?

FM: But I, I am telling you that the owners of these hotels like us are not dealing with the reality. What we are hoping for is that this person who is coming from the United States that is just their spokesperson, and Barry Louin who is the representative, and the most important director from Blackstone in Puerto Rico...if he decides to show up, let him come. [inaudible] all the people if they have an understanding and that they have the right to be able to come to the negotiations table and say, well, we are going to get back to reality and we are going to get this, if there is a pause, that they take out the list and they be authorized to negotiate. This is what we are hoping for. We do not want these people to get here like they did last time, some lawyers from Blackstone itself that, after being seated at the table for three days, when seeing the proposal said "Oh, no", that they need to call whoever [inaudible] because they did not have the authority to make decisions and well they DO NOT have the authority to make decisions. We don't want these people. We are hoping that [inaudible] arrives, arrives with authority and we can end the collective bargaining that [inaudible] that they can give to the hotels here in Puerto Rico.

IN: Why did you decide to hold these demonstrations over three days?

FM: We held this demonstration over three days for various reasons. We need to, eh, emphasize that all three hotels have the same owner, they are, eh, different people...we want to let them know that we are united. What we really want is that Blackstone know that, for the first time in Puerto Rico...for the first time in Puerto Rico, the employees, there are more unionized employees than ever, there are more unions than ever. Right now, when we have the demonstration at Condado, there will be people from the Caribe Hilton and El San Juan, just like the rest, and every time we hold one, there will be employees there from all the hotels, supporting arm in arm, hand in hand, this is what we want to show them, that is why we hold them in three different hotels, but with different people, and these are hotel employees giving their support to one another. This is what we want them to understand.

IN: How many employees do you expect will take part in the demonstration?

FM: Well, I wouldn't say that they will all be able to attend since we are in the busy season and the employees, as everyone knows, need to work for Christmas and everybody wants to have money for presents. We are hoping there will be about 400 people or more, eh, we also have invited different unions, eh, who are giving us a hand and are giving us their support, eh, since this local, well, previously did not get together

with these unions; I, as President of the Local, have decided to change this. And we have decided that, if we give our support to another union, the other union will give us their support. And we are expecting about 400 people for this activity.

IN: Many thanks for the information.

FM: I thank you.

IN: You just heard Félix Mejías, the President of Local 610, Gastronomic Union, UNITE-HERE in Puerto Rico,. From the staff at the WAPA Radio station, this is Frances [inaudible].