

OHA Working Group Update for OHA members

July, 2016

For the last few months, members of ad hoc Labor Working Group, composed of OHA members across North America, have been in close contact with members of the union, UNITE HERE Local 11. The OHA's conference hotel, the Long Beach Renaissance, is currently on UNITE HERE'S boycott list. OHA signed its contract with the Renaissance well before the boycott was announced, and we face severe financial penalties should we break the hotel contract. Hence, the Labor Working Group has been working to create public awareness about the labor conflict at the Renaissance. Our goal is to amplify worker's voices with the goal of building solidarity and using our position as concerned practitioners of oral history to help resolve the labor dispute as quickly as possible.

Labor problems at the Renaissance Long Beach Hotel have led staff to seek the right of union representation with UNITE HERE. Specifically, the workers at the hotel are requesting a card-check union election procedure with a promise by the Renaissance that it will remain neutral and ratify a first contract in a timely manner should the majority of workers sign cards asking for union representation. The hotel has yet to agree to this request.

Our group has been conducting bi-weekly national phone conference meetings to strategize to build a solidarity campaign with organizers of UNITE HERE as guides in this process. We have organized two concurrent pro-worker efforts: a letter writing campaign that has garnered over a dozen letters of support for the Renaissance workers from national, professional organizations and a recently initiated social media campaign.

Should the labor dispute extend into October, we are also working on a plan to offer members pro-worker t-shirts, buttons, etc., at our OHA annual meeting in Long Beach. The Labor Working Group will work to raise funds to provide these materials to members.

Finally, we are working closely with the union to organize a solidarity picket near the hotel during our annual meeting in case the labor dispute is still going on in October. We will be encouraging OHA members to participate in this picket with time and location to be released as soon as possible.

Despite the boycott, we encourage OHA members to come to our 50th anniversary annual meeting at Long Beach. While we understand that personal or professional obligations may prevent staying in or attending events within a boycotted hotel, our presence and participation in the labor support activities can be a powerful way to reinforce a value common to most oral historians--that all people deserve a voice, in this case a voice on the job through a union of the workers' choice.

Our overall goal is to use our influence and energy to help resolve the labor dispute by October! However, we are also planning for the possibility that the situation will not be resolved in time for OHA's annual meeting.

If you would like to write the hotel, solicit letters of support from your professional organization, or join the social media campaign, please contact Paul Ortiz, Chair, OHA Labor Working Group, at ortizprof@gmail.com.