



Hotel Workers Rising: Lifting one another above the poverty line.

No one who works should have to live in poverty. Yet that is the condition faced by many Toronto hotel workers, many of whom are new Canadians, women and people of colour.

Hotel Workers Rising is a movement to create a better future offering good jobs in Toronto's hotel sector. Hotel workers should not have to work two jobs, sacrifice their health and have their children grow up in poverty. This is the reality today for those who work in back-of-the-house hotel positions, where upwards to 90 per cent of workers are immigrants.

Toronto's hotel industry is prospering. Profits now come from higher luxury standards in many hotel chains. New luxury standards have been introduced like bigger beds, heavy duvets and more room amenities. Yet the same number of housekeepers is expected to do the extra, and heavier, work. Injuries are soaring among women housekeepers.

Hotel workers must share in the prosperity that their hard work generates—for the health of our city, our communities and our families.

Hotel Worker Jobs

- The median wage of Toronto hotel workers is \$26,000 per year¹.
- Median hourly wages: Housekeepers (\$10.48); Laundry (\$11.22); Dishwasher (\$10.60). Union wages are higher, with housekeepers making an average of \$14 an hour²
- 70% of Toronto's 'Accommodation Services' workers are immigrants; 52% are visible minorities³.
- Hotel housekeepers have soaring injury rates; they report more injuries than workers in heavy construction⁴.

1. Industry Profiles in Toronto CMA 2003, City of Toronto
2. UNITE HERE Local 75, Stats Canada, Toronto CMA

3. Tourism Toronto
4. National Work Injuries Statistics Program, 2003

City Mayors Welcome Hotel Initiative

Mayors in cities including San Francisco and Los Angeles have met with hotel workers. They understand that raising standards in the hotel sector is good for cities, their economies and their communities.

Toronto Mayor David Miller joined with film actor and activist Danny Glover and hotel workers at the December 2005 launch of Hotel Workers Rising. The Mayor said that *"The prospect of better jobs, training and career advancement in the hotel sector holds out hope, not only to our hotel workers, but to our youth who are seeking meaningful employment."*

Our City and It's Economy

Hotel Workers Rising is part of a movement to raise the standard of living of one million workers in greater Toronto who earn less than \$29,800 per year. In June 2005, Toronto and York Region Labour Council launched its *Million Reasons to Take Action* campaign. It said that workers in many sectors are undervalued and underpaid. Labour Council called on governments, employers and unions to ensure these workers, many of whom are people of colour and new Canadians, are not left behind.

When workers and their families can lift themselves out of poverty, then the communities in which we live, shop, worship and pay taxes, become better places to live.

Poverty in Toronto

- Between 1981 and 2001, the poverty rate for immigrants to Toronto increased 125%.⁵
- In the 1990s, incomes of two parents dropped by 13% in real dollars; those of single-parent families dropped by 18%.⁶
- 35.1% of Toronto's children live in low income families (less than \$22,500 per year).⁷
- The income gap between the wealthy and less well-off continued to grow, while profits in 2004 were the highest in history, at 14 per cent of Canada's GDP.⁸
- Only 26 per cent of Toronto's jobless are eligible for Employment Insurance coverage.⁹

5/6. A Decade in Decline, United Way of Greater Toronto,
7. Vital Signs 2005, Toronto Community Foundation.

8. Stats Canada, National Income and Financial Accounts
9. Canadian Labour Congress, Stats Canada

A Movement Across North America

In the past decade, hotel chains have become globalized. These hotel giants include Starwood (Sheraton, Four Points, Westin, Le Meridian), Marriott (Renaissance, Ritz Carlton), Fairmont (Delta), Intercontinental (Crown Plaza, Holiday Inn), Hilton International, Hyatt and Four Seasons.

In these cases, hotel workers are no longer bargaining with local hotel management. Wages, benefits and pensions are mostly set by worldwide head offices of hotel chains.

The only way in which hotel workers can hope to achieve better wages and benefits is to work together. Hotel workers throughout Canada and the U.S. will all have their contracts expiring during 2006. Cities in addition to Toronto include: New York, Boston, Chicago, Honolulu, Monterey, Seattle, Detroit, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Twenty-three hotel contracts will have expired in the Greater Toronto area on January 31, 2006.

A High Road Vision

Hotel workers want a partnership with hotel owners to take a 'high road' to prosperity. UNITE HERE Local 75 represents over 6,000 Toronto hotel workers. It has hired Janet Dassinger, a leading expert in labour training strategies and programs to:

- Set up training initiatives with Centennial College and George Brown City College.
- Approach government officials at all levels for funding support.
- Establish a training program with the Royal York Hotel, as part of its recent collective agreement.
- Establish a training initiative with the Sheraton Hotel as part of an agreement for workers who are laid off during the hotel's construction during 2006.