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San Francisco Hotel Workers Heat Up the New Year

Joined by national labor leader, hotel workers engage in nonviolent civil disobedience, announce boycott of the Hilton San Francisco

(January 5, 2010, San Francisco, CA) – Over one thousand hotel workers and their community allies take to the streets today in downtown San Francisco, demonstrating against major hotel corporations’ refusal to settle a fair contract. They are being joined by Richard Trumka, President of the AFL-CIO, who along with over 100 union members and community supporters will participate in nonviolent civil disobedience. The demonstration launches a customer boycott of the Hilton San Francisco Union Square.

Today’s action comes after nearly five months of negotiations and street actions (including strikes), in which hotel workers have been seeking modest increases to sustain health care and retirement benefits for a one-year period. None of the major corporations that manage San Francisco’s hotels have expressed an interest in settling such a contract, even though it would have required just a 1.5% increase in labor costs during a one-year period. For instance, the union’s proposal would have cost the Hilton San Francisco just \$550,000 this year.

Meanwhile, despite the economic downturn, major hotel companies have continued to prosper. The Blackstone Group – which owns Hilton Hotels – announced recently that it has \$12.6 billion in available capital, and expects that “the next several years will provide an unusual opportunity to invest in high-return assets.” It paid its CEO, Stephen Schwarzman, \$1.39 billion in 2008. Starwood Hotels reported \$180 million in profits during the first 3 quarters of 2009. Hyatt Hotels launched a public share offering in November that netted its owners nearly \$1 billion in proceeds.

“We’re determined as ever to win a good contract,” said Ingrid Carp, a 29 year cook at the Hilton hotel. “It’s wrong for corporations to position themselves to make billions with the coming economic recovery, and expect us to go backward.”

As a result of the companies’ refusal to settle a contract in 2009, San Francisco hotel workers will be fighting alongside over 40,000 other hotel workers across North America in 2010. Workers in Chicago and Los Angeles are currently working without contracts, and workers in six other cities will have their contracts expire in the coming months: Toronto, Minneapolis, Monterey, Vancouver, Honolulu, and Washington DC.

About Unite Here! Local 2: Local 2 is the union of hotel and food service workers in San Francisco and San Mateo Counties. It represents about 12,000 workers in the hospitality industry.

About the AFL-CIO and Richard Trumka: The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) is a voluntary federation of 57 national and international labor unions. Richard L. Trumka was elected President of the AFL-CIO in September 2009, after serving as its secretary treasurer for 15 years. Prior to that, he was a member and leader of the United Mineworkers of America.