

Society of American Law Teachers SALT

Public Advocacy Center, Room 223

Touro Law Center

225 Eastview Drive, Central Islip NY 11722

631 650 2310

www.saltlaw.org

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September 1, 2010

Susan Westerberg Prager, Executive Director

Association of American Law Schools

1201 Connecticut Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20036-2717

Dear Dean Prager:

The Society of American Law Teachers (SALT) calls on the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) to honor the boycott of Hotel Employee and Restaurant Employee (HERE) Local 2 at the Annual Meeting in San Francisco in January 2011. The main conference hotel, the Hilton San Francisco Union Square, along with other hotels in San Francisco, are under boycott by HERE; their multinational corporate parents remain intransigent on wage and health care benefit issues affecting some of the lowest paid workers in our economy. SALT makes this call to stand in solidarity with those who work at these hotels where the AALS is currently scheduled to meet. HERE has been trying to negotiate a fair contract for over a year while the multinational corporate employers continue to seek more from the workers in health care premiums and wage concessions, even while these chains outperform Wall Street expectations. Because hotel chains have great economic resources and are frequently owned by multi-national corporations, it is imperative that unionized workers in hotels rely upon sources of leverage beyond withholding their own labor in order to obtain fair agreements. Cooperation from organizations holding conventions is particularly significant to their efforts to obtain economic justice.

The employees have decided that the best way to obtain a fair contract from the hotels is to exert economic pressure through boycotts, at great cost to themselves, much like the civil rights boycotts and international boycotts of the past. The core educational values of justice and public service that law professors are supposed to instill in students will not be on display if AALS members have to weather the picket lines of low wage workers in order to hold meetings. Further, many featured speakers will refuse to cross union picket lines causing havoc to the planned order of the meetings.

Even though unionized hotel workers have a higher standard of living than many in the hospitality industry, a 2004 study by the UC-Berkeley Labor Center found that many workers are economically marginal, because of the high costs of living in the Bay Area and the frequent lack of regular employment opportunities in the industry. At the same time, the owner of the Hilton San Francisco Union Square (Blackstone Group) recently posted its fourth-straight quarterly profit and increased the value of its private-equity holdings by 16%.

We recognize that AALS will incur some cost and inconvenience in honoring the boycott. First, we acknowledge the efforts that AALS leadership and staff have put into planning the Annual Meeting. Second, we realize that there may be some sunk costs in the current hotel. We are asking the AALS to honor this boycott because there are other site alternatives and to respect the wishes of the workers and the many AALS members and speakers who will not patronize a boycotted hotel. As shown on the attached list, other large hotels in San Francisco, while designated "at risk" of a labor dispute, are not currently subject to boycott. We urge the AALS to move all program sessions to another nearby hotel, understanding that some individuals will choose and already have chosen to stay at the Hilton.

At the very least, the AALS should warn attendees of the ongoing labor disputes and that legally protected concerted activities may be occurring at the time of the meeting, which would disrupt the orderly conduct of the proceedings. At other hotels, the union has engaged in new "flash mob" techniques that can come without warning inside the hotel. Successful meetings are unlikely when employees are engaging in protected activities, such as slowdowns and picketing, after expiration of their collective bargaining agreement.

In the past, the AALS has been sensitive to these issues. During similar labor negotiations in 2004, AALS had planned to move the San Francisco meeting sessions from the Hilton Union Square to two nearby hotels not under boycott as late as November 2, 2004. (See Dean's Memo 04-34). The imposition of a 60-day cooling off period several weeks before the annual meeting in January 2005 meant that AALS could and did meet at the Hilton Union Square free of picketing and disruption.

The AALS should not wait for another cooling period before acting, in part because it is only through the pressure of large institutional clients such as the AALS that the labor dispute will be settled. We urge AALS to take action now in the interest of law faculty, staff, and the workers at the hotels who have voted overwhelmingly to use a boycott as the means to achieve a fair contract.

Sincerely yours,



Raquel Aldana
Co-President



Steven Bender
Co-President

Enc. UNITE HERE Hotel Guide, September 1, 2010