

Federal Panel Upholds Claims that Space Needle Violated Workers' Rights

Space Needle Workers Hope For Final Answer to 2013 Labor Charges

SEATTLE – A three-member panel of the federal body that monitors U.S. labor law issued a decision and order in favor of Space Needle workers and their union at the end of the day Friday.

“I’ve been a line cook at the Space Needle for ten years,” said Andy Roos, “and the past three years have been excruciating. Work shouldn’t be this stressful. My coworkers and I are committed to our jobs and want to share in the success of the symbol of Seattle. Perhaps this decision will be a wake-up call to the Space Needle owners.”

Workers first brought charges of unfair labor practices against the Space Needle in 2013. They won an initial legal victory in 2014 when an administrative law judge found for their claims, but management had appealed the ruling.

In Friday’s ruling, National Labor Relations Board Chair Mark Gaston Pearce and members Kent Y. Hirozawa and Harry I. Johnson III found Space Needle management had violated federal labor law by undertaking a number of efforts aimed at discouraging workers from supporting or participating in their union since their contract expired in 2011.

The NLRB officers found that Space Needle management failed to recall two pro-union employees; distributed letters to employees encouraging them to resign from the union; polled employees about their attitudes toward the union by tracking their response to those letters; made coercive statements to workers about the union; and reneged on a prior written agreement with the union to resume payroll-based deduction of its employees’ union dues.

In response to the Space Needle’s legal violations, the National Labor Relations Board ordered the company to desist from anti-union interference among its employees, return two employees to work with back pay, and pay hundreds of thousands of dollars in back dues that the company owes to the union representing Space Needle workers, UNITE HERE Local 8.

"What is most important is that the workers who lost their jobs two years ago get back to work and that the coercion and the unfair treatment of workers stops," said Erik Van Rossum, president of UNITE HERE Local 8 and a former Space Needle server’s assistant. "Seattle is a place of deeply-held values and intense pride, and the symbol of our city shouldn't be associated with this kind of illegal behavior."

Space Needle workers recently sought support from Seattle City Council in their ongoing fight for a new contract and overdue raises. The company has offered workers just one raise in the last 4 and a half years—an increase of \$0.35 an hour two years ago.

“Together, we have fought back against this trampling of workers’ rights,” said SkyCity restaurant server Julia Dube, one of two workers who will return to the Space Needle if the ruling stands. “Today is a tremendous day for Seattle workers, and especially those at the Space Needle.”

UNITE HERE Local 8, the hospitality union of the Pacific Northwest, represents nearly 5,000 workers in hospitality and foodservice throughout Washington and Oregon, including SkyCity restaurant employees, banquet servers, elevator operators, greeters, and other workers at the Space Needle.

The Space Needle is owned by the Wright Family, descendants of the founders of both the Howard S. Wright Construction Company and PACCAR, Inc. Owner Howard S. Wright III recently served as the co-chair of Mayor Ed Murray's Economic Inequality Advisory Committee.

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