

# HOTELWORKERS STRUGGLE A MODEL OF RANK AND FILE RESISTANCE

by Emily Tang

*"We will support the [union] officials just so long as they represent the workers but we will act independently the moment they misrepresent them."* -

Statement made by Scottish workers in 1915 when they organized a grassroots movement inside their unions.

Over the last few months, OCAP has given support to a drive by workers at the Metropolitan Hotel in downtown Toronto to organize against the regime at the Five-Star Sweatshop that they work in. Workers at the Metropolitan are setting an example that needs to be followed. As employers and governments step up their attack on poor and working people, a labour bureaucracy wedded to deal making and determined to stifle resistance has become a barrier that must be overcome. Rank-and-file workers have to ally with those in the community who are fighting to win and take up serious struggles over the objections of their bureaucratic union misleaderships. The Metropolitan Hotel Workers Committee has taken up the above slogan. If workers organize on that serious, militant basis, passivity in the face of abuses like those being dished out at the Metropolitan can be challenged and the long retreat in the face of employer/government attack can be replaced by an upsurge of real resistance. Below is a speech given by hotel worker Emily Tang at a recent forum on women organizing in the workplace.

My name is Emily Tang and I work in the Banquet Services Department of the Metropolitan Hotel in downtown Toronto. I came to this country nearly

twenty years ago from Hong Kong with my family. My mother became a hotel worker and I did too. I started working at the Metropolitan seven years ago. It is owned by multi-millionaire Henry Wu, who also comes from Hong Kong. His entry into Canada and his life have been a lot easier than for most Chinese immigrants including many of his own workers.

The Metropolitan is a luxury four-star hotel that treats its customers very well and they have high expectations. The workers are almost all immigrants. Filipinos make up the largest group with many Chinese, Southeast and South Asians, and West Indians. Of the roughly 200 workers at the hotel at the moment, about 150 are women. In some departments like housekeeping, women make up almost the entire work force.

Working conditions in the hotel are very poor. The work is bad for our health. The chemicals used in cleaning make housekeeping workers sick. I work on banquets. I have to lift heavy equipment like food warmers that I'm not supposed to. My shoulder, back, neck, and arms have been injured and the pain lately has got worse. At least one worker in ten at the hotel is presently injured but they are pushed to perform regular jobs. One worker was driven from her job after 14 years because she developed cancer and they did not want to be bothered with her.

We work long hours with no breaks or time to eat. It is common for me to work 16 hours without a rest. One time, I took a cookie that was going to be thrown out anyway because I had had no break and a 12-course banquet was about to start. I was disciplined for taking company property. The laws that regulate breaks and hours of work are ignored, but, if we don't get a dinner break, they still deduct half an hour off our pay.

Management harasses us. Housekeepers tell me that if managers don't like them, they will deliberately mess up the rooms after the work has been done and blame it on the workers. The official language in the dining room is English but one of my friends was