

CALIFORNIA DOMESTIC WORKERS WORKED TO EXHAUSTION: ASK FOR EIGHT HOURS OF SLEEP, PALATABLE FOOD AND A LITTLE RESPECT



Domestic workers are those people without whom no households can manage. It is their unflagging but mostly unsung efforts that allow the lady of the house to reach her office on time handling all chores, from burping babies, to making sure granny takes her medicine on time, to tidying up and doing the dishes, no effort is beyond them. However, they are now demanding that they be given the respect due to them and that their work gets recognized for the worth and substance they bring. This they are doing through their newly acquired talent for flashmobbing, gathering unexpectedly in public places singing and dancing to get their feelings across. A new video, brought out by Mujeres Unidas Y Activas, with Aretha Franklin's "Respect" playing in the background, whilst training the workers, also helps highlight the pains and problems of the domestic workers, who work round the clock and are unable to react owing to discriminatory labor policies. Behind all the fun is serious business. California domestic workers are asking for a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights that if enacted through state legislation will provide them with safety, self-respect and fundamental defense from abuse on the job. Domestic workers, mostly work as nannies, housekeepers and health-assistants to the elderly and are generally women from poor Latino immigrant communities. Such work is also, wrongly relegated to the bottom rung of the labor force, thereby making it easy for employers to pay them less and exploit them without fear of repercussion. Most of these jobs are dominated by immigrants, most of them illegal. Extreme poverty and fear of being exposed to the immigration authorities, forces them to remain silent and tolerate employer abuse. Further weakening their cause is that they have no paid sick days; they work under no contracts that can be enforced and are not attached to any union, thereby lacking collective bargaining power. According to the National Domestic Workers Alliance, the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, would change the entire domestic worker scenario and bring in some balance between the rights of the employers and the rights of the domestic worker. The main demands are an 'Equal Overtime Pay' would provide all California's domestic workers *overtime protections of time and a half after 8 hours in one workday and 40 hours in one workweek and double time after 12 hours in one workday. Among other things the workers are demanding that they be given the 'Right To 8 Hours Uninterrupted Sleep Under Adequate Conditions.'* Most domestic workers work long hours and become prone to sickness and accidental risks owing to sheer exhaustion. The bill would guarantee appropriate and adequate rest for them. The bill would also give them the 'Right To Cook One's Own Food,' and not have to endure unhealthy and eat food that is not to their liking. Domestic worker problems are also a moral and ethical issue and there is a continuous debate over where the line should be drawn. It should not be forgotten, that they also have their own households to support and they also pay a heavy emotional toll of separation from family that they have left behind whilst crossing borders, in the hope of higher wages and economic stability. It seems that the new initiative will result in victory and better lives for the domestic workers. Their exclusion from fundamental labor laws, is hard to comprehend and an appalling omission that fuels feelings of prejudice and discrimination – its time the children of these domestic workers, stop wondering if their mothers will get any respect at work.