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THE SERVICE WORKER



“Cafe Staff at Mariuchi Organize for Better Conditions”

Over the weeks since the publication of the first article, cafe workers at Maruichi came together to stand against the increasingly bad conditions of the store. Four long-standing employees took the correct position on the side of class struggle, choosing to not overlook injustice and to develop class solidarity by uniting around one small but mighty action.

This action came in the form of a letter addressed to the regional manager and his higher-ups. This letter demanded that the workers get the pay of \$15 an hour plus tips, as it is the going-rate nowadays for these types of positions. Furthermore, after the cafe lead left, workers were forced to pick up more responsibilities in order to keep the cafe running smoothly, so this \$15 an hour was intended to make up for these extra duties. The letter also requested clear communication from the regional manager in regards to responsibilities, as communication has been an issue for most every aspect of the store. Giving a deadline, the letter stated that if these things were not implemented then the workers would no longer take on the managerial tasks that had been dumped on them. The letter was written and signed by 4 members of cafe staff; a few days before handing in the letter, a new employee started at the cafe who did not want to participate in the promises of the letter and so was left out of the signing and the negotiating process. However, it was agreed that the request for \$15 an hour would extend to the new person and any future hires as well.

Three days after delivering the letter, the regional manager sent an email to the whole store announcing some changes. Sandwiched between complaints of the store not making money, the burden of pay-roll, and references to “the changing political landscape,” the point of the email could essentially be boiled down to that they were “eliminating the ‘tipped barista’ position.” The store would no longer carry “any drinks that require ‘skill’ to make” and all employees would be cross-trained to do both grocery and cafe front-of-house duties. With this change, everyone in this position would be receiving \$15 an hour plus tips no matter if they were to work grocery or cafe.

A few days after that initial email, one of the former cafe employees who signed the letter was fired. While a few employees, mostly one lead in particular, had complaints about the employee who was fired not working hard enough or not being good enough at customer service, from the perspective of the worker who was fired and many others at

Maruichi this person was not given any warning and the complaints about their performance did not warrant being fired. Although most of the shift leads seemed to agree that these decisions (which they were not informed about prior to the rest of the staff) were going to be implemented whether or not the cafe staff had submitted their letter, the timing is so convenient that the letter at least likely influenced the speed at which the changes took place.

This is obviously not the outcome that the cafe workers desired when they organized this action. For one, since tips are split among now over a dozen people rather than 4, it has been an almost irrelevant change in pay. Secondly, one of the staff who signed the letter was fired, possibly in retaliation. Thirdly, morale has not improved at all. Even though the rest of the staff who signed the letter have not officially been fired, they still effectively lost their jobs. They are no longer practicing the barista skills they came in to do, and the experience of customer service is just generally worse when you have to answer to customers why you suddenly no longer carry any of the most popular items.

Despite these undesired outcomes, this action was overall positive. The \$15 an hour was a justified and correct ask, which sets a precedent for the store and the company’s other locations to pay their workers fairly. Plus, because of the time and a half pay on Sunday, cafe staff who do work Sundays can actually feel the pay increase at least somewhat significantly. Most importantly, this situation exposes the weakness of the capitalists in comparison to the power of collective action among workers. After a very small push from employees, management made the more drastic decision of cutting drinks in order to hastily maintain control of the situation. Clearly there was concern over setbacks that may have occurred if cafe staff had followed through with their promises.

The solution to these undesired outcomes are more organization, not less. These struggles in the workplace are the battlefield on which the contradiction between capitalist desires and workers rights are played out. In order to keep pushing towards our goals, not just store-wide, not just company-wide, but for the common goals across the working class, we need to continue to push and fight. It is through continued struggle that we build our collective power, secure better economic conditions for the present, and further the progression to a world free of class oppression.

Are you a service worker? We want to hear from you!

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