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# THE SERVICE WORKER



## “Midwood Smokehouse and the Southern Service Industry”

Midwood Smokehouse is part of the larger FS Food Group chain which owns several restaurants described as “Food Concepts” in the Charlotte area. These are often restaurants found in the “trendy” neighborhoods of Charlotte, which are often the site of displacement of the city’s working class residents, or its more high-income neighborhoods. The working conditions at Midwood mirror those of many workplaces in North Carolina, which according to an Oxfam America report conducted in 2021, ranked dead last at 52nd for working conditions in the United States. Like many of the surrounding states, the working conditions in North Carolina are completely abysmal compared to similar jobs in the Northeast or on the West Coast. There are no protections for women or nationally oppressed workers, and no required benefits; meaning even when back-of-house workers at Midwood Smokehouse are making twice the NC minimum wage, the employees are struggling as a comfortable living wage far exceeds what they are making.

One of the greater burdens is the lack of any benefits whatsoever. Without healthcare, workers might avoid doctors visits and addressing health problems that might turn into larger problems later, exacerbating the monetary issues. Not to mention, many are one bad accident away from getting bankrupted from medical bills. Further, the lack of any paid sick-time is easily crippling for the many workers who live paycheck to paycheck.

The excuse that the service industry is not a

long-term job falls apart when examining similar restaurants, such as the Cheesecake Factory and PF Chang’s, which offer benefits ranging from healthcare and childcare to parental leave. The service industry is generally a precarious industry though, where workers can be easily hired and fired. This leads to a situation where not having benefits is standard across the industry, and a workplace like Midwood becomes the rule and not the exception.

The company adds to this problem with a common strategy: trying to cut back on labor costs. So far some employees have already experienced their hours being cut, and it’s likely that more will join as the season starts to slow down. The companies we work for can fully afford to give us proper benefits and pay us a living wage, but they pinch pennies any way they can to scrape out a little more profit.

When all of these problems are standard for an area it is easy to become discouraged or feel complacent about the position that we are in. However, it is important to remember that our lives and jobs are worth fighting for. The workers have reasonable and realistic demands that have the potential to be achieved through strong organizing efforts. We need to begin to form a shop unit of like-minded workers to start to build our power. If we can do so, we can protect ourselves against day-to-day abuses of power from the managers over the employees, and build towards gaining our economic demands.

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

**Contact: [Org\\_CSW@proton.me](mailto:Org_CSW@proton.me)**

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