

TECH

Cafeteria Workers At Intel Are Protesting

Unions have been trying to organize Silicon Valley's lowest paid workers for years. Now, with the help of a growing coalition that includes white collar workers, they might be seeing some progress.

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BuzzFeed News Reporter

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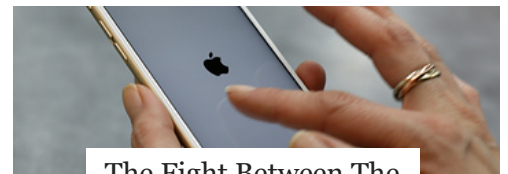


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by Sheera Frenkel

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Unite Here has been trying to organize the cafeteria workers at Intel for years. Back in 2014, when workers were at risk of losing their jobs, the union organized a protest on the tech company's campus. But the workers ultimately didn't win a union contract.



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Two years later, though, the people who serve food to Intel's employees are still on unhappy. There are around 75 cafeteria workers at Intel, according to a Unite Here spokesperson — and as of yesterday, they were picketing once more.

The cafeteria workers aren't technically Intel employees. They work for a company called Guckenheimer Corporate Dining. But, because they work alongside Intel employees, a growing coalition of labor activists wants to hold the tech company responsible.

The years since 2014's protest have seen the advent of a group called Silicon Valley Rising, funded and organized by Working Partnerships USA. It's a coalition of local religious leaders, labor unions, housing advocates and even a coalition of white-collar tech workers. Organization members are united by their concern over increasing inequality between the developers, engineers, coders and designers who get all the glory in Silicon Valley's tech industry, and the janitors, landscapers, drivers and food service workers who work there, too.

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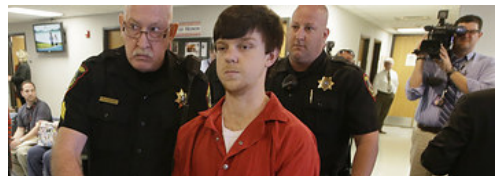
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On Wednesday, the combined efforts of those groups saw somewhere between one and three hundred protesters gathered at Intel's Santa Clara headquarters. Carrying signs that said "Guckenheimer @ Intel has union contract", they called for Guckenheimer, the contracted company that actually employs the cafeteria workers, to give them "fair process" to unionize.

The average annual salary in Santa Clara County, where Intel is located, is \$93,500. Nahima Aguiniga, a single mother of two who works in the Intel cafeteria, said her roughly \$14-an-hour wage puts her at less than \$30,000 a year. "I want my kids to live in the place where they grew up, where they can go to school with a tech engineers' kids," she told BuzzFeed News. "I have to live with my ex-mother-in-law in a one bedroom with my 14-year-old son and my nine year old daughter. I don't think that's fair."



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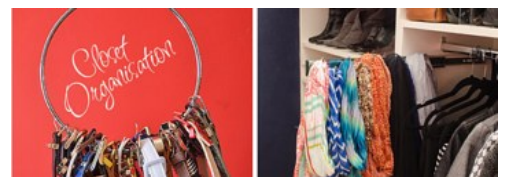


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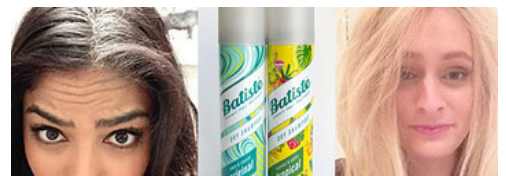


To Kill a Mockingbird inspired me to write more to read more and to grow as a better person. Thank you for everything, Harper Lee.

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But it's not clear whether Aguiniga's fight is really with Guckenheimer at all. A spokesperson for Intel told BuzzFeed News via email that the company is switching its food service over to a company called Eurest at the end of the month. The cafeteria workers who currently show up to work at Intel's campus every day might have the chance to apply to work with Eurest, or they could be moved to jobs with another Guckenheimer client, or they could lose their jobs altogether.



David Urhausen
@DavidUrhausen

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Most people have heard of Intel computers, but few have heard of Eurest Dining Services or Guckenheimer Corporate Dining. For this reason, Unite Here and the other Silicon Valley Rising members are trying to hold Intel responsible for the working conditions of the people who serve food there. The California Supreme Court recently [passed](#) a law that puts big companies on the hook for everyone who works for it, whether they are employed through a contractor or not. But in this instance it seems pretty clear that Intel doesn't want to get involved with the problems its lowest paid workers are having. "It is not appropriate for Intel to get involved in the question of whether or not the workers desire union representation," said an Intel spokesperson via email.

Earlier this month, Intel published the results of its 2015 Diversity and Inclusion Report. The announcement was laden with self-congratulatory language, despite the fact that 75% of Intel employees are male and 86.1% are white or Asian. In an open letter regarding these figures, Intel CEO Brian Krznich did acknowledge that these are "tough issues" and said the company is "far from done."

What's interesting, though, is, based on an informal survey conducted by Unite Here, a little over half of the cafeteria workers at Intel are women, and 78% of them are Hispanic. The company is spending millions of dollars trying to to recruit more diverse job candidates, but some say it chooses to ignore the concerns of one of the most diverse groups of workers at its headquarters.

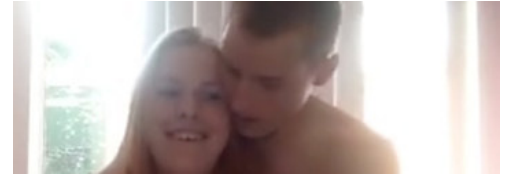
"We, the contractors, sustain Intel," Aguiniga said, "but they don't sustain us."

Caroline O'Donovan is a senior technology reporter for BuzzFeed News and is based in San Francisco.

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