



### **Labor and Management Dispute FAQ**

There is currently a labor management dispute between the Hyatt Corporation and the UniteHere labor organization occurring at several Hyatt hotels. Two of these hotels are being used by SBL and AAR for our 2012 Annual Meetings in Chicago: the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place and the Hyatt Regency Chicago. This Q&A provides more information for any members with questions.

#### **What is the nature of the dispute between the Hyatt Corporation and UniteHere?**

UniteHere and the Hyatt Corporation are in the middle of a disagreement over a wage-and-benefits package for employees as well as a conflict involving methods of union organization. During this dispute, UniteHere has urged travelers and meeting planners to boycott the hotels involved in the dispute, including the Hyatt Regency Chicago and the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place. Other hotels targeted for boycotts are in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Honolulu.

#### **Are the hotels workers at the Hyatt Regency Chicago and the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place on strike?**

No. The workers at these Hyatt hotels are not on strike.

#### **Will SBL participate in a boycott?**

After carefully considering this matter, the SBL Council has determined that participating in a boycott of the Hyatt Regency Chicago and the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place is not in the best interest of our members and exhibitors, nor is it an appropriate or viable course of action. SBL remains committed to holding its meeting November 17-20 as planned.

#### **Why is SBL not participating?**

SBL's non-profit status and charter is to fulfill its [mission](#) as a learned society, serving the professional needs of its members, advancing the academic study of biblical and related texts, and advocating in higher education to foster the future of biblical scholarship. Joining the boycott, or any advocacy outside the bounds of our charter, would compromise our organizational status. Furthermore, joining the boycott would constitute a breach of contract, incur penalties of approximately \$750,000, and require replacing negotiated member room rates at higher prices. The penalties would deplete financial reserves entrusted to the organization for its stated purpose, and breaking these contracts would place SBL in a weak position in negotiating future contracts and make it an ongoing target of protest.

#### **Is SBL taking a side in this disagreement?**

No. The actions SBL has taken have been neutral as to a position and are primarily two-fold: offering members options should they choose to use other hotels, and reducing the risk SBL as an organization faces if members choose not to use the Hyatt. SBL recognizes that the issues are very complicated. Federal mediation is involved, operates in a strictly confidential manner, and is not able to provide facts in the dispute. Inserting ourselves in these negotiations would be counterproductive and might

misrepresent the position of either the Hyatt or the workers who are members of UniteHere. Further, such action on SBL's part would presume a consensus among SBL members on a matter not directly associated with membership in SBL.

**Is SBL concerned about these issues and the working condition for hotel workers?**

SBL Council and the SBL staff certainly have sympathies with hotel workers everywhere, and we want to uphold the dignity of all workers. We also recognize that our own members will have a variety of views and perspectives on this issue, and SBL Council and staff are working to provide for individual members opportunities to make their own choices in this matter. With these principles in mind, after the boycott was announced, we negotiated with the hotels and won concessions that lowered our contractual obligations for room numbers as well as food and beverage service. As a result, some members may decide to support the boycott without triggering financial penalties to the hotel for breach of contract. Furthermore, in keeping with our charter we invite our members to take up questions of ethics and justice as a part of the academic discourse in biblical studies and as part of our Annual Meeting, publishing program, and research agendas. While SBL will not participate in a boycott, it facilitates open and critical conversations on these matters. Indeed, actions that hinder free and open access to discussion are undesirable. The Society's programs are devoted to issues that are core to the humanities, social sciences, and religious studies, including social justice and public policy. Program participants are invited to share their views on these subjects whenever relevant to the program topic.

**Will SBL respond in any way to the labor dispute?**

We are actively encouraging UniteHere and the Hyatt to conclude a new agreement. SBL will remain in contact with the hotel, monitor the situation as the contract negotiations continue, and keep our members updated on any developments. Regarding future meetings, it is always possible that labor management disputes will again arise between the signing of a contract and the date of a meeting. Due to the size of our conferences, it is necessary to make arrangements years in advance, and we currently have contracts for the Annual Meetings through 2021. SBL respects the rights, dignity, and worth of all people. Before the contracts are jointly signed, SBL and AAR consider the labor practices at prospective hotels and convention centers. When we sign contracts, we do so in good faith that should a labor agreement expire, it is in the best interest of all parties to renew it quickly and with fair labor terms. Stemming from this debate, the SBL Council and staff will analyze other methods to integrate further social responsibility into its negotiations and contracts for future conference venues. We will keep members informed and involved as new approaches are being developed.

**Why is SBL being approached by UniteHere?**

UniteHere has approached many organizations whose meetings take place at hotels that have an expired labor agreement. SBL is not alone; other professional organizations, meeting in other Hyatt properties, have also been approached by UniteHere, with similar requests.

**What if I am contacted by either party in this dispute?**

If you feel you have been contacted inappropriately, please let us know by calling 404-727-3151 or forwarding email to [SBLExec@sbl-site.org](mailto:SBLExec@sbl-site.org). If you have any question at all about this matter or the SBL in general, please use the same contact information, and SBL staff will be happy to assist you.