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[Claims of slave-like conditions in Bimini](#)

National News

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Bimini's Labour Department is investigating claims of labor abuses after several expatriate former construction workers of the Bimini Bay Resort and Marina, who claim they had been working in "slave-like" conditions, publicly criticized the company following their return to Mexico.

An article published in Saturday's edition of El Universal, a Spanish-language newspaper, brought attention to the plight of the seven men who managed to "escape" Bimini after three months of allegedly working in relative servitude.

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According to the former employees, an additional 100 workers from Queretaro, Noble, Chiapas, and Federal District remain on the island. The men were reportedly lured to Bimini with false promises only to find less-than-savory conditions when they got there.

Mauricio Holy and David Alejandro claimed that they were paid less than minimum wage, worked 11 hours a day, received paltry medical attention, and were without any form of communication during their three-month employment span.

The men further alleged that their documents were taken from them when they arrived in The Bahamas and they were given work permits so that they could move freely about the island; however, according to one employee who spoke to The Guardian on the condition of anonymity, the Mexican workers are not even allowed to leave the compound on weekdays.

The employees claim they make about \$3 a hour, which is \$2 less than what most Bahamian employees make at the company. And sometimes, one worker indicated, they are not even paid on time.

The Guardian attempted to reach Bimini Bay's General Manager Patrick Perishon for two days, but calls were not returned and the Assistant General Manager Ben Davis was not taking any calls. The Guardian also attempted to reach the person responsible for construction, but was told that he was off the island.

Additional calls were made to Labour Director Harcourt Brown, who did not respond; and Labour Minister Dion Foulkes was off the island for the week.

According to Brown's secretary, the director made calls to Bimini's Labour Department and directed them to look into the matter and

speak to management. However, the employee said, if individuals from the Labour Department really want to investigate the matter, they need to speak with the employees first, and not management.

According to El Universal's reports, Holy said after working for a month without receiving any pay he decided to discontinue working. According to him, the workers are mistreated, insulted and insufficiently fed. Additionally, he alleged that if they showed signs of resistance they were threatened with imprisonment.

Another worker, David Alejandro Gonzalez, said he was only able to contact his relatives when he was brought to Nassau for medical attention after falling off a scaffold. He was hospitalized for 18 days before he returned to his home country.

The men claim they were overworked and mistreated. Their work began at 7 a.m. each day and ended around 5:30 p.m. They were fed only rice with beans and were forced to sleep in a shed with up to 70 people.

According to Ernest Rolle who heads Bimini's Labour Department, he spoke to Bimini Bay Resort and Marina's management about the claims. "They've assured us that they've already sent someone to Mexico to find out why these individuals would make such allegations. That is as much as I can say on the matter right now."

Asked if the department could mediate, he said not unless a dispute is filed, and to date that has not happened.

However, while no expatriate individuals has approached the offices, several Bahamians have.

"There have been a number of complaints from Bahamian employees," said Rolle. "But I can't comment on those issues right now because management along with myself, we are sitting down and trying to see if we can get to the bottom of this and try to alleviate the problems that the employees believe exist."

"We're still going to initiate an investigation though. What I've asked management to do is provide me with certain information but I can't comment on that request either. But we are looking into it," Rolle said.

The Bahamian employee, who works 9-hour-days, said persons — tired of working in such harsh conditions — are leaving the company every week. "The company had to start calling on people from Nassau and other islands because people are walking off the job every day. The people are very unhappy but a lot of the them are only working for the penny because they have a need and can't do any better.

"They get away with it, because this is a private company, but they need to stop," the employee said, adding, "The living arrangements are bad and the treatment on the whole is not good. We are constantly insulted."

Conditions are particularly bad for Mexican and Cuban-American workers, he said.

One resident on the island, who also did not want to be named, said residents are not happy with the company. "I don't know how or if their presence affects Bimini. In terms of naturalization — I don't see anything happening even though they are said to be investing in the Bahamas," the resident said.

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