

Twin Cities security guards slated for one-day strike

Rob Jorgenson
27 February 2013

Security guards in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area are preparing for a one-day strike this week after seven subcontractors to major corporations broke off negotiations without presenting an offer. Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 26, which represents over 2,000 guards, announced the walkout after a February 24 deadline passed without any movement.

At the same time, Local 26 announced a tentative agreement for some 4,000 janitors who clean office complexes that house corporate giants like Target, US Bank and Wells Fargo. The employer group negotiating with the janitors had demanded the slashing of 1,200 full-time jobs and the elimination of health care coverage. The reduction of full-time jobs was withdrawn and, according to the union, workers obtained \$1.20 an hour wage increase over three years, an improved health care plan and an additional sick day.

The contract struggle had been building for a joint strike of all security guards and unionized janitors. In addition, an unknown number of non-union janitors seeking representation under the organization CTUL (Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha/Center for Workers United in Struggle) were scheduled for a one-day strike late Monday night.

The struggle takes place at the same time as both the Minnesota Orchestra and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra have been locked out and there are indications of significant support throughout the working class in general for these workers.

Janitors and guards service buildings that house the offices of executives like US Bank CEO Richard Davis, whose total pay in 2010 was \$18.8 million and \$13.6 million in 2011. Davis has been the lead negotiator in the talks with the Minnesota Orchestra, where he has

demanded pay cuts between 30 and 50 percent.

SEIU Local 26 President Javier Murillo told workers last Sunday that, “The fight doesn’t end until everybody wins.” But the calling of a one-day strike can be easily absorbed by the companies while they maintain their obstinacy toward granting the security guards and non-union janitors any significant gains.

Earlier this month, the Minnesota AFL-CIO said it would support the janitors and guards with its 300,000 members. Bill McCarthy, president of the Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation, told workers, “Your fight for justice is our fight” and that they had the support of its 75,000 members.

But there are no plans by these union executives to mobilize workers behind the guards and non-union janitors. They remember far too well the labor uprising in Wisconsin back in 2010 and have no intention of risking a similar mass struggle being ignited on behalf of some of the most oppressed workers. The only solution is to organize independently to unite all workers in a joint struggle.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Paul, a security guard, about the issues facing his co-workers.

“My motivation in this is to improve working conditions,” he said. “There are loopholes in the contract that the companies can use to terminate us.

“In building services unions, specifically in security, you have a company that you work for, and what can happen is that the building that you’re working at might decide to go with a different subcontractor. If you want to stay at your building, you automatically have a new employer and their policies may absolutely suck. That’s what has happened to me.

“I was working at one site with this company and another company bid on the site, got the contract and moved in. And I really disliked the new company. I

didn't want to leave my building. I liked the client, I liked my co-workers, and I had no desire to leave.

"The company at this point can use the client request in the contract. It basically says that the client can use a clause in the contract to remove anyone from the building site for any reason and without any kind of review at all. We can't grieve it and most of the time the officer doesn't even know why he's being removed.

"The biggest problem with this clause is that sometimes the account managers that work for the subcontractors are given a blank check to basically let anybody go for any reason. This can allow for things like nepotism. The account manager can look at a guy and say, 'I don't like that guy,' and that guy is gone.

"I want those things changed. Otherwise, the working conditions at some of these sites are very difficult. You're always on pins and needles and if you're not good friends with the account manager, you're going to get axed.

"The problem that we've had with the security companies is that they haven't come to the table with us. They've been averaging about one day of bargaining a month. We put our economics on the table back over a month ago. We only asked for a \$1 wage increase. But they haven't come back with anything.

"We're bargaining with an entire industry," Paul added, "not just one company. There are seven security companies. These are guys that compete against each other. They're always trying to get more market share. They're trying to stab each other in the back and at the same time they're trying to figure out ways to come together to stab us in the back.

"Above the subcontractors are the corporations. They hold all the power on the economic side. The subcontractors will only be able to pay their employees what they are able to get from the corporations above them.

"Look at Target. They're the number two retailer in the country. This is a company that is making record profits. And yet, they're only paying people \$7 an hour to clean their stores. I think that's horrible. I make \$12.85 an hour. I can't fathom how somebody can make it on \$8 an hour.

"From what I've heard, Target has a team of union-busters and a jet on standby ready to go anywhere in the country to deal with unions. They show their

employees videos as to why it's bad to be in a union.

"That's why we're not picketing American Security (subcontractor). We're picketing the banks and corporations that American Security has contracts with. Because all it takes is one of these companies to call up American Security and say, 'You need to settle with these guys.'

"I think the great recession was an intentional power grab by the large corporations. After the economic boom of the Clinton years, there were more jobs than people. But after 9/11 and going into this great recession, that has shifted. There are now too many people and too few jobs.

"All of this is an attempt by large corporations to privatize everything and make a profit. That's where it's headed. Right now, we're talking about the bankruptcy of the postal service. And if you look at that issue closely enough, you'll see that the postmaster general was previously an executive at FedEx. Now, all of a sudden, the postal service is nearly insolvent because they forced them to have money for 10 years of pensions on hand by a certain date in order to bankrupt them. To me, it just seems to be an attempt to privatize mail.

"It's the same thing with education moving to charter schools. The charter schools are getting public money, and that's going to gut public education. Virtually every industry is like that.

"To me, the primary reason for it is that the corporations are too heavily involved in government. That needs to be separated. It needs to be eliminated."



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact