

Sanitation strike continues in San Diego

Republic Services mobilizes scab labor against striking workers

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On Thursday, striking sanitation workers, employed by Republic Services, voted 136 to 86 to reject a contract agreement between the company and the Teamsters Union Local 542, a so-called “improved” contract proposal, and to continue their strike in parts of San Diego and Chula Vista, California. The workers rejected a wage offer of little more than the rate of inflation.

At issue for workers employed by the trash hauling monopoly Republic Services are “better wages and pensions, improved working conditions and better trash trucks, and safety equipment.” Due to their low wages, many of the workers are forced to work 12 hours a day, six days a week under conditions that compromise their health and safety, to support themselves and their families.

Teamster Local 542 Secretary-Treasurer Jaime Vazquez claimed that the negotiations have settled the issue of better equipment and safety gear. All that remains to be settled are wages.

With boldchutzpah, Republic Services accuses the workers of being unrealistic, for “disregarding San Diego labor-market rates.” The company insists that its wages, even before the strike began, were more than adequate, given labor conditions in the San Diego area.

The strike is now in its fourth week. According to Republic Services management, Local 542 had met 15 times before the deal was agreed upon, five of those sessions held in the presence of a federal contract mediator.

At the vote, which took place in the Local 542 parking lot, several workers that voted in favor of the contract described the financial hardship they are now under because of the strike, declaring at the same time

their determination to continue fighting with their comrades.

As in other struggles, the Teamsters are taking advantage of this financial pressure to force an approval of a contract that prevents “wage inflation,” in response to the cost-of-living explosion.

The union also refuses to link up the fight of the San Diego strikers with other sanitation workers and workers more broadly. Contract negotiations with Republic are taking place in at least eight locations: San Diego; San Francisco; Stockton, California; San Jose, California; Richmond, California; Seattle; Pittsburgh; and New Orleans. The union is isolating strikes, ensuring struggles are staggered, with the recent strike by Republic workers in Orange County that was ended just a day before San Diego workers went out. The strike is part of a broader movement of workers that has included autoworkers at Volvo, health care workers, John Deere workers and Kellogg’s and other food processing workers.

On January 1, the California minimum wage for employers with more than 26 workers went up \$1 to \$15/hour, a 7 percent raise, which barely compensates for the San Diego Consumer Price Index [CPI] increase for the year (6.5 percent). In comparison, the wage offer by Republic Services two weeks ago, of \$1 for starting wages (from \$15 to \$16), barely matches the CPI increase in what is already one of the most expensive regions for working class households in the United States.

Adding insult to injury, on the eve of the strike vote, company board members received their annual stock award for 2022 of \$230,000. The waste service giant took in \$10 billion last year, with over \$2 billion in

profits. All these profits are based on a superexploited workforce which is made possible by the AFL-CIO and Teamster unions, dedicated to isolating the struggles of workers, even in the same industries.

This relationship now makes it possible for Republic to assemble a force of contract strike-breakers (bluecrewjobs.com). The union is allowing the “Blue Crew” to cross the picket lines with impunity. *Bluecrewjobs* services are costing the company nearly twice the starting pay for present trash truck drivers, including the cost of room and board for those who come from out of town and from other states. At the same time the company is urging striking drivers to cross the picket line.

Following the vote, Republic management announced that its crew of scabs is already operating its regular trash collection schedule in Chula Vista (pop. 275,000) and making strides in other parts of San Diego.

“Our Blue Crew relief drivers remain on the job and continue to make progress servicing our customers,” declared the company.

The San Diego strike is in danger of defeat. The lesson of this struggle and past struggles against Republic Services is that what is required is the construction of rank-and-file committees independent of the procompany unions to conduct a genuine fight. This includes rank-and-file oversight of contract negotiations, the elaboration of demands based on workers’ real needs and a strategy aimed at linking up the struggles of workers in different locations and industries. Republic Services workers interested in finding out more should contact the *World Socialist Web Site*.



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