

Growing support for Southern California trash collection workers as local government seeks to break month-long strike

Rafael Azul**15 January 2022**

The strike by 250 refuse collectors in San Diego and Chula Vista, California against waste disposal monopoly Republic Services is now in its 29th day. This week, refuse collectors in Western Washington joined the strike in solidarity.

Despite claims by Republic Services management that its “Blue Crews” of strikebreakers were bringing trash collection back to normal in Chula Vista, since the strike began, refuse cans and bins have not been picked up consistently, particularly for businesses and apartment buildings.

On Tuesday, January 11, Chula Vista’s city manager Maria Kachadoorian declared a public health emergency caused by uncollected refuse, citing pest infestations and contamination of streets and drains. City employees and volunteers will be assigned trash collection duties; supplementing the work of nonunion scab crews contracted by Republic.

At the meeting last Tuesday city officials pressured Republic Services to settle the strike. “Without the labor of the sanitation workers, your multi-million-dollar corporation would not be worth a dime,” declared Chula Vista Mayor Mary Casillas Salas. The Phoenix-based firm, partially owned by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, reportedly made \$1.2 billion last year.

In contrast, many Republic workers are forced to work 60-hour weeks to make ends meet. Republic refuses to consider even the spineless wage demands made by the Teamster negotiators, of \$0.50 per hour in the first year of the contract.

Under an agreement signed between Chula Vista and Republic in 2014, granting the firm a 10-year refuse collection franchise, the company is not being held at

fault in the face of “uncontrollable” circumstances, such as natural disasters or “insurrections,” including strikes.

The agreement limits the city’s options but allows it to charge Republic for the cost of trash removal in emergencies.

Behind the wording of this contract are the political connections that exist between the Chula Vista City Council and Republic Services. According to a report in San Diego’s *La Prensa* daily, every one of the city council members has received and accepted political contributions from Republic Services. In 2015, Steve Miesen, a Republic Services division director and shareholder, was simultaneously appointed to the city council to occupy for two years the vacancy left when Mary Salas resigned from her seat, after being elected mayor. At the time Miesen was also President of the Chula Vista Chamber of Commerce.

Miesen’s appointment created a great deal of controversy, and the city ended up spending more than \$150,000 defending its decision. It was City Attorney Glen Googins who defended Miesen’s appointment.

At the city council meeting, Teamster representatives urged the city council to force Republic Services to give in to the workers’ wage demands. At the same time Teamster organizer Salvador Abrica indicated that strikers receive weekly strike pay of between \$250 and \$350, a pittance compared to what they normally make and what it takes to live in San Diego and Chula Vista. This starvation strike pay plays into the company’s tactic of encouraging workers to cross the picket lines.

Silva Sylvia, a striker’s wife, initiated on Wednesday a campaign to raise funds to meet the shortfall in strike pay. The GoFundMe campaign raised \$9,000 on its

first day from more than 100 strike supporters with a goal of \$20,000, with scores of workers expressing their solidarity. Pickets in support of the strike have appeared in Seattle, Washington, and other cities in western Washington state.

In response to the presence of pickets from the San Diego strike, four days ago over 300 Republic Services workers serving Seattle, Bellevue, Lynwood and Kent in Washington state went on a “work stoppage” in solidarity with their San Diego comrades.

Workers are ready to fight and understand the need for unity, as evinced by the solidarity shown by Republic workers elsewhere and countless other examples by teachers, students and health care workers worldwide. What is required now is a network of organized and independent rank-and-file committees where workers take direct control over their future and mobilize in a political fight against a decrepit and murderous system that cares nothing about the health, hygiene and welfare of humanity. Please contact the *World Socialist Web Site* to join such committees.



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