

2,000 sanitation workers at Republic Services involved in nationwide strikes

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A wave of strikes and solidarity actions by sanitation workers at Republic Services, America's second-largest waste disposal company, has erupted across the country. It is an important development in the growing resistance of the American working class.

From Boston to the San Francisco Bay Area, Atlanta to Ottawa, and Seattle to Southern California, some 2,000 sanitation workers are either on strike or honoring picket lines in a national fightback against brutal working conditions, poverty wages and systemic abuse. Their strike has left trash piling up in city streets and the corporate-political establishment scrambling to contain what could become a far wider revolt.

The Republic workers' demands reflect both immediate grievances and long-simmering systemic issues within the waste management industry.

They are demanding living wages for dangerous, grueling work that leaves many struggling to survive, especially in cities like San Francisco and Boston. They are seeking affordable health insurance, retirement security for landfill workers and safer working conditions in one of the deadliest jobs in the country.

The strikes are all the more significant given the strike earlier this month by 9,000 Philadelphia city workers, including sanitation workers, was betrayed by the union bureaucracy. Wages and the cost of living were also a key issue, with workers demanding substantial pay increases, as well as the right to live outside of the city while employed by the local government.

The Philadelphia strike had a powerful impact, with garbage piling up across the city, and workers supporting a broadening of the strike, but the AFSCME union shut down the strike at its most powerful, accepting the city's demands.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, refuse and recyclable material collectors were ranked as the fourth deadliest job in the country in 2023, with a fatality rate of 41.4 deaths per 100,000 employees, significantly higher than the national average for workplace fatalities.

Widespread reports of racist mistreatment underscore a toxic, exploitative environment, with many workers stuck in low-paying, frontline roles.

The strike wave currently underway began on July 1 in Boston, with hundreds of workers in Teamsters Local 25. It quickly spread westward. Bay Area workers joined days later in solidarity, unleashing a three-day trash pile-up across two dozen cities.

In Stockton, Manteca, Lathrop, and Daly City, workers are also

out. In Atlanta, Lacey, and Ottawa, the picket lines hold. In Orange County, a "supermajority" of workers are refusing to cross picket lines from elsewhere. And in Southern California, more strikes are imminent, with overwhelming strike authorizations from members of Teamsters Local 396.

On Friday, July 11 the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with Ron, a Republic sanitation worker from Boston, on the picket line at the Republic facilities in Anaheim, California.

"The workers at this Republic facility here in Anaheim can't join the strike, and that's why you don't see them with us. They're just not crossing the line, but they are honoring our picket line, and that's how they're supporting us. The majority of the guys are supporting our strike. There are a few who decided to go in.

"I'd say about 85 to 90 percent are supporting us, and it's already paid dividends, in my opinion. And then some of these guys are crossing the line and working. They made their own choices. I get it. People have families and bills to pay, they've got responsibilities. Even though the Teamsters are paying you to strike.

"We also have sent our pickets to Republic facilities in Santa Ana, San Diego, Huntington Beach and Seattle. Also in Georgia too."

Ron explained, "The kind of work that we do is one of the five most dangerous jobs in the country. There's so many different aspects to it. If you look at this truck, it's a front-loader. So these guys don't have to get out of the truck.

"But the other ones which require one guy to hang from the back of the truck, there have been multiple cases this year alone, where I've seen guys who are putting in stuff get hit by cars. Someone isn't paying attention, and they're crushed into the back of the truck. It's happened multiple times.

"And we work at a transfer station. We work with heavy equipment all day like here. And then there are guys who may not be paying attention, somebody walks in front of a machine without watching, a lot of people get hurt. You have to be really careful on this job.

"When we go to work every day, whether it's us or somebody else, there's always that danger."

The struggle has a national character and the potential to grow beyond a single employer. The rank and file faces not just Republic Services, but the corporate and political order that enables it—an order now spearheaded by the Trump administration,

which has unleashed a reign of terror against immigrant workers in particular.

When the WSWWS reporter spoke about the independent rank-and-file investigation that the IWA-RFC is pursuing into the death of autoworker Ronald Adams Sr., Ron said he “absolutely” supported it. The company, the union and the OSHA officials have done nothing in over three months.

“We started our strike on July 1. We gave Republic a deadline, July 7, to come up with something better. They didn’t, so now we’re spreading the strike,” he said.

The fascistic ICE raids now storming hospitals and community centers in military-style operations are the domestic face of a broader class war against workers. Many of those on strike today are immigrants or children of immigrants, fighting not only for wages and benefits but for their very right to exist in this country. Republic Services workers now stand on the front lines of a fight that touches every sector of the working class.

But if workers are to win this battle, they must first identify and overcome the most immediate obstacle in their path: the Teamsters bureaucracy itself.

Led by President Sean O’Brien, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters postures as a militant, fighting union. In reality, it functions as a junior partner of corporate America and the state. Its role is not to wage struggle but to prevent it. Every major labor conflict under O’Brien’s leadership has ended in betrayal.

In 2023, the Teamsters sold out the 340,000 UPS workers—one of the largest private-sector labor forces in the country—by calling off a strike at the last minute and ramming through a contract filled with concessions. The result was mass layoffs, including 20,000 jobs being cut this year in what UPS called a “streamlining” of operations, aided and abetted by the union.

The union officials, having maintained a guilty silence for years, now claim to be opposing a buyout program for drivers, but have not done anything to prepare a strike or any other action. A recent webinar addressed by O’Brien had comments disabled in order to censor workers’ anger at the apparatus.

At CVS earlier this year, workers voted overwhelmingly to strike. Days later, the Teamsters announced a contract and forced a snap vote, bypassing the rank and file entirely. The betrayal sparked outrage. But for the bureaucracy, that was the point, to smother the rebellion before it could spread.

Earlier this year, the Teamsters sold out 18,000 Costco workers by rushing through a subpar contract without giving members time to review it, preserving tiered wages and worsening conditions.

Republic Services workers have been through this before. In 2021, when sanitation workers last went on strike in California and elsewhere, the Teamsters shut it down piecemeal, isolating one local after another, forcing through rotten contracts and keeping the national struggle from materializing.

Behind O’Brien’s “tough guy” persona lies a right-wing, nationalist politics completely aligned with the ruling class. He spoke at the Republican National Convention and stood onstage during Trump’s 2025 inauguration. And he has made clear that he supports Trump’s anti-immigrant, pro-corporate policies because they protect the privileges of the union bureaucracy.

O’Brien and the union bureaucracy have social interests

different from and hostile to those of workers. The Teamsters’ own financial disclosures speak volumes, with 213 officials making over \$200,000 a year.

No faith can be placed in this corrupt apparatus. It exists to defend the employers, not the workers.

The expanding Republic Services strike reveals the enormous potential power of the working class. Sanitation workers have the ability to bring entire regions to a halt. They provide a service vital to public health and the functioning of society. When they stop, society feels it immediately.

But to realize this power, workers must take control of the struggle out of the hands of the union bureaucracy. They must learn the lesson of the Philadelphia strike, which confirmed the iron rule that so long as workers remain under control of the apparatus, the only possible outcome is a sellout. There is no doubt a similar betrayal is being prepared by the Teamsters.

In response to the sabotage of the strike, Philadelphia workers have formed an independent rank-and-file committee to call for an immediate resumption of the strike on an expanded basis, adding 3,000 of the city’s white-collar workers, Philadelphia transit workers and others.

Republic workers must form their own independent rank-and-file strike committees—democratically controlled bodies of workers, independent of and opposed to the union officials, which can coordinate actions, communicate across regions and prepare a nationwide strike.

Such committees must call for an end to secret negotiations, with all negotiations under the control of rank-and-file representatives and livestreamed over the internet; full strike pay for all workers involved; no return to work without a deal which meets workers’ demands, as well as adequate time for workers to study and discuss the tentative agreement; and the expansion of the strike to link up with workers in other industries who are facing similar attacks.

This fight must also link up with the broader opposition to the Trump administration and its fascist policies—from ICE raids and police violence to union-busting and privatization. A political general strike must be prepared to oppose not just this or that employer, but the capitalist system as a whole.



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