

# Big realtors in New York City demand massive concessions from residential building workers

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Roughly 34,000 porters, doorkeepers and maintenance workers, members of Service Employees International Union Local 32BJ, who work in residential apartment buildings in New York City, will vote on whether to strike today. The current four-year contract with the Realty Advisory Board on Labor Relations (RAB) expires on April 20. Without a deal before midnight the next day, workers will strike across 3,600 residential buildings with about 600,000 units and 1.6 million residents. Workers have told the *World Socialist Web Site* that a vote for the strike is likely to pass overwhelmingly.

Contract negotiations between Local 32BJ and the RAB have come to a standstill. After sending out a bargaining questionnaire that drew more than 10,000 responses from its members, 32BJ began formal negotiations on March 5. The real estate companies are preparing for a strike and have sent notices to residents telling them to keep hallways clean and collect their own boxed deliveries. Private security has been contracted for building lobbies. The union has also informed its members that a strike is likely.

The RAB unites dozens of the wealthiest real estate companies in the United States, including SL Green, which reported about \$1.0 billion in 2025 revenue, Vornado Realty Trust, which reported about \$1.81 billion and Tishman Speyer.

Market-rate rents in Manhattan, where many 32BJ buildings are located, have surged since the last contract was negotiated in 2022. Recent listings data place the median rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Manhattan at between \$5,100 to \$5,200 a month. In many cases, a one-bedroom may rent for as much as \$12,000 a month. A thousand units rented at an average of \$3,500 a month yields \$42 million annually. Forty units rented at \$12,000 a month brings in \$5.76 million a year.

Workers' gross base pay ranges from \$62,000 to \$68,000. The workers who clean, maintain and staff these buildings are, in most cases, priced out of living in them themselves.

The RAB is demanding major concessions from workers, including:

- a low-paid permanent tier for all new hires beginning immediately. The lowest current rate for 32BJ building workers is \$22.32 an hour;
- the introduction of out-of-pocket payments for health care coverage;
- no increase in pension contributions;
- although no figure has been released, the union has asked for raises of \$2 or \$3 an hour, while the RAB will almost certainly propose abysmal wage increases.

The RAB claims that New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani's campaign promise of a four-year rent freeze on 1 million rent-regulated apartments is creating an "existential crisis" for landlords. Howard Rothschild, president of the RAB, stated that the "likelihood of zero percent rent increases... will significantly limit the industry's ability to support wage growth."

While some landlords own rent-regulated buildings with both regulated and unregulated units, these are generally older structures that do not command the highest market rents. The RAB's claim of an existential crisis is spurious.

But whatever the RAB claims about Mamdani's rent-freeze policy, 32BJ officials have long tied workers to the Democratic Party by presenting capitalist politicians as allies against the landlords. In the 2025 mayoral race, they promoted Mamdani in exactly these terms. Mamdani spoke at the 32BJ union hall in November, before his election, and former New York City Comptroller Brad Lander campaigned for him as a surrogate in October

2025. Before the mayoral election, 32BJ bureaucrats told workers that an “ally” like Mamdani would help them take on the billionaire landlords.

Mamdani has said that he supports “building workers’ quest for a fair contract that honors their contributions to our neighborhoods and our city,” and a building worker spoke from the podium at the Mamdani-Sanders rally on Sunday.

This is all hot air. Mamdani has signaled both before and after his election that he is no threat to the ruling class and will actively work in its interests. He has met with some of the richest New Yorkers, including real estate magnates, as well as with one of the most dangerous representatives of the oligarchy, Donald Trump.

Mamdani’s meetings with financiers, landlords and Trump are not just photo opportunities. They express his real role: containing social opposition and helping shut down workers’ struggles before they can threaten the profit interests of the ruling class. Mamdani called on striking nurses at four major New York City hospitals this winter to settle their contract and return to work. His mistitled Deputy Mayor for Economic Justice, Julie Su, played a central role in shutting down the nurses’ strike and forcing them back to work with none of their major demands, especially safe patient-staffing ratios, met. When Su was Joe Biden’s deputy secretary of labor in 2022, she was instrumental in formulating strikebreaking legislation that outlawed a rail workers’ strike.

Local 32BJ, for its part, has made concessions in the past and there is no doubt that they will do so again in the face of an employer’s offensive. It allowed the introduction of a “New Hire Progression” in 1997, in which new hires started at 80 percent of the highest wage while taking 30 months to move up to top pay. By 2018, the union agreed to a set up with a three-step, 42-month progression track. Starting and second rates are respectively 75 percent and 85 percent of the highest pay schedule, each taking 21 months of employment to move up. Now the RAB is demanding permanently lower wage tiers for new hires.

Building workers will have to break free of the Mamdani administration and the 32BJ bureaucracy if they are to defeat the RAB’s conspiracy to slash wages, benefits and working conditions. They must form a rank-and-file strike committee to lead the strike and prepare to expand it. Workers in thousands of buildings are deeply connected to other sections of the working class across the city through critical industrial and service supply chains.

Porters, for example, are the first to handle garbage and

recycling, which are then removed by New York City Department of Sanitation workers and private sanitation workers. Building maintenance workers occupy a key position in the chain of labor connected to water, gas and electrical systems.

Porters and maintenance workers also work with thousands of, usually small, companies involved in wallpapering, flooring, tile cutting, window installation and cleaning, and boiler maintenance. They interact with plumbers, sewage and drain cleaners, heat pump and water system specialists, and Con Edison workers who supply buildings with gas and electricity. They also work alongside fire alarm technicians, elevator mechanics, inspectors, repair workers and cleaners. All of these workers have a common interest in fighting alongside building workers.

Doorkeepers, finally, are the last link in logistics, shipping and handling. They are, in effect, “last-meter” delivery workers, an extension of the “last-mile” delivery phenomenon that has grown over the past two decades, especially with the rise of Amazon and the gig economy. According to the New York City Comptroller’s Office, there are about 45,000 last-mile delivery workers in New York City.

Doorkeepers have seen an enormous increase in daily package volume. Package rooms have become cramped warehouses, and in new buildings with 500, 1,000 or more apartments, they are often so large that dedicated “package-room doormen” are assigned to them full time. Sorting and organizing deliveries from UPS, the Postal Service, DHL and FedEx has itself become a full-time job.

All of these are workers whom a Building Workers Strike Committee must mobilize to defeat the real estate titans. Local 32BJ will seek to isolate the strike and shut it down. But a mass struggle uniting these sections of the New York City working class, based not only on the needs of building workers but of all workers, will be an unstoppable force.



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