



NEWS

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Service Employees International Union

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONTRACT TALKS BEGIN FOR 30,000 NEW YORK CITY APARTMENT BUILDING WORKERS

– Building Owners See 28% Rise in Property Value While Building Workers Face 11% Rise in Cost of Living Over the Same Period of Time –

– Strike Could Directly Affect More Than Three Thousand Apartment Buildings, Coops and Condos and One Million Residents –

New York, NY – Negotiations for a new, multi-year contract began today between the Realty Advisory Board (RAB), an industry association representing most building owners in New York City and 32BJ SEIU, the largest private sector union in New York. The contract covers 30,000 doormen, superintendents, resident managers, handymen, concierges and porters working at apartment buildings throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island.

“The workers who keep apartment buildings running well and residents safe should be able to make ends meet in our city,” said Mike Fishman, President of 32BJ. “This campaign is about more than a new contract, it’s about keeping our city a place that working families can still afford to call home.”

Talks Focus on Wages, Health Care, Pensions and Training

Major issues include wage increases to keep up with the rising cost of living, maintaining affordable family health care and ensuring adequate funds for training and retirement. In an effort to lower building operating costs, the union is encouraging employers to participate in a new “Green Buildings” training program. “Building owners and managers will benefit from lower operating costs when building workers are trained in state of the art energy efficiency practices,” said Kyle Bragg, 32BJ Vice President for Residential Building Service Workers.

“A contract that fairly addresses the needs of workers is in everyone’s best interests,” said Bragg. “Building owners, managers and residents all benefit from a professional, skilled and stable workforce that has demonstrated its reliability and loyalty over the years.”

Hard to Get By on \$40K a Year in NYC

“Working families like mine are being pushed out of the city,” said Felicia Estrada, a door attendant in Washington Heights.

In the four years since the last contract, the consumer price index (CPI) in the New York City area has jumped 11.3%. The cost of milk and other everyday items is up more than 10%.

“Apartment building workers and working New Yorkers should be able to live in the city where they work,” Bragg said. “Because working families are an indispensable part of our economy and neighborhoods, we must make sure the city remains affordable to all New Yorkers.”

“We work hard every day so we can pay the bills and give our kids an education,” said Deon Fenton, a concierge on the Upper East Side.

Real Estate Industry Fundamentals Strong; Forecast Even Stronger

In the four years since the contract was last negotiated, the value of residential real estate has grown by 28% in New York City. According to the Marcus & Millichap National Apartment Index, New York jumped five spots to third in the country this year, and looking ahead the city-wide vacancy rate is expected to drop this year as well. In just the last week, we learned that the vacancy rate in Manhattan dropped another ¼ percent in January to 1.59%.

“Despite the economic downturn, the New York real estate industry still boasts the lowest vacancy rate in the country and the highest average rent,” said Fishman. “This \$584 billion industry surely has the capacity to ensure that the workers who maintain their buildings can support their own families.”

“Building worker labor costs, which are just eight percent of an owners operating costs, increased less than other operating costs,” said Fishman.

Recession Over; Recovery Underway

The economy has exhibited two straight quarters of growth, signaling an end to the recession. Furthermore, according to the Blue Chip Economic Indicators Report (February 10, 2010), the economy is expected to continue growing for at least several more quarters.

“Locking workers into a multi-year contract with insufficient wage increases would be unfair when the economy is poised for a comeback,” said Fishman. “We should be looking ahead and not behind when setting wages for the next three or four years.”

Talks to Resume on March 17th

Failure to reach an agreement by the end of the day on April 20th could lead to a strike directly affecting more than one million New Yorkers living in over 3,200 apartment buildings across the city. Talks are scheduled to resume on Wednesday, March 17th.

“No one wants a strike,” said Bragg. “But we’re committed to do what it takes to get workers what they need.”

With more than 120,000 members, 32BJ is the largest property service workers union in the country. For more information, visit <http://www.standwithbuildingworkers.org/press>

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