



# NEWS

**Service Employees International Union**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **NYC OFFICE CLEANERS GIVE BARGAINING COMMITTEE AUTHORITY TO CALL A STRIKE**

*– Strike Could Directly Affect 1,500 Commercial Office Buildings including Rockefeller Center, the Met Life Building, the Empire State Building and the Time-Warner Center –*

**New York, NY**—Thousands of New York City office cleaners and commercial building workers voted Thursday to authorize their bargaining committee to call a strike if necessary. Failure to reach a new contract by 12:01 a.m. on January 1, 2012 could lead to a strike of more than 22,000 office cleaners at over 1,500 commercial office buildings citywide.

“The real estate industry’s demands to roll back the wage and benefit standards of lower middle class workers are unacceptable,” said Mike Fishman, President of 32BJ SEIU. “Today’s strike vote shows we are determined to keep our city a place that working families can afford to call home.”

The workers, who were joined at their meeting by Mary Kay Henry, President of the Service Employee International Union (SEIU), have been in contract talks with the Realty Advisory Board (RAB), an industry association representing most building owners, since November 15th.

“At a time when the commercial real estate industry is returning to form, the men and women who keep office buildings clean should get what they need to support their families in the most expensive city in the country,” said SEIU President Mary Kay Henry. “Protecting good jobs will strengthen our struggling middle class and fuel the economy recovery we all need.”

The union strongly opposes an owner proposal to establish a two-tier wage and benefit structure for new hires, aimed at creating a lower second class of workers, as well as other measures that would make it harder for current and new workers to make ends meet in New York City.

“A two-tier wage system would be a giant leap backward for all workers because it drives down wages and benefits for years to come,” said Fishman. “The industry’s sole purpose in creating a second tier of workers is to replace the first tier with lower paid workers.”

The top rate for commercial office cleaners represented by 32BJ is \$22.65 an hour or \$47,000 annually, significantly less than the household income that independent researchers have shown is necessary to support a family of four.

“Forty seven thousand dollars a year is not a lot of money in New York City,” said Enma Mehmedovic, who cleans the Sony Building in Midtown Manhattan. “I’m raising my two teenage children by myself. It takes two pay checks just to be able to buy my kids’ clothes and shoes.”

“Rolling back wages and benefits of the workers in these jobs makes no sense,” said Fishman. “These workers live in the city with the highest cost of living in the country, and the real estate market here is the most profitable in the country. Their wages afford them only a lower middle class standard of living. Cutting wages and benefits would make it significantly harder for them to raise their families, and would hurt their communities and our city’s economy.”

Meanwhile, the \$20 billion Manhattan commercial real estate industry has just experienced its busiest third quarter in

three years -- with sales activity reaching \$6.3 billion, according to Crain's. That puts 2011 on track to be the third highest total-sales year on record, surpassed only by the boom years of 2006 and 2007. In addition, there have been six straight quarters of rental gains with top quality buildings up 10.7 percent in the past 12 months, according to CoStar.

"Nobody wants a strike --least of all the men and women who keep New York City's office buildings clean, but we must prepare for one if building owners insist on taking us down that path," said Fishman.

With more than 120,000 members, including 70,000 in New York, 32BJ is the largest property service workers union in the country and the largest private-sector union in the state.

For more information, visit [www.standwithbuildingworkers.org](http://www.standwithbuildingworkers.org) .

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