



Dozens of Janitors at Northern California Safeway Supermarkets Stop Work - Contractors' Proposed Benefit Cuts, Intimidation Are at Issue

OAKLAND, Calif., Feb. 11 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- As union contract negotiations between janitors who clean Northern California Safeway supermarkets and Safeway's janitorial services contractors continue into their fifth month, dozens of janitors stopped work on the night of Wednesday, February 10. The janitors were motivated by their frustration with the contractors' unfair intimidation of workers, including illegal threats of termination, and proposals to sharply reduce standards for wages and benefits.

"I walked out because Safeway's janitorial contractors are not working with us to negotiate a contract which will remedy unsafe and unhealthy conditions in the stores, and help us support and build a life for our families," said Leodegario Acevedo, a janitor in Santa Rosa. "I am standing up for my rights."

Contract negotiations between SEIU United Service Workers West, Local 1877, the labor union of 450 janitors at Northern California Safeway supermarkets, and Safeway's janitorial services contractors ABM, Crystal, Premier, and AMS, have been ongoing since October 2009. During negotiations, the group of four contractors has proposed a large increase in the number of hours of work necessary to be eligible for healthcare benefits, wage increases of only 10 cents per year, and the right to unilaterally take janitors out of their pension plan. For newly hired janitors, the Safeway contractors have also proposed to eliminate dental care benefits, increase the waiting period for medical coverage, and lower starting pay to just \$8.60/hour.

The janitors at Safeway stores are currently paid just \$10.24 per hour, on average, while Safeway, Inc. is the third-largest U.S. supermarket chain, with an estimated \$44.8 billion in annual sales.

Safety and health are also at issue in the contract negotiations, as the Safeway contractors flatly refused to add "Green Cleaning" standards to the contract, and refused to provide complete critical information to the union on health and safety and hours of work. Janitors at Safeway currently use toxic industrial cleaning chemicals that cause serious health problems, and may pose a risk to food safety and supermarket customers' health.

"Safeway wants to be seen as a responsible, neighborhood grocery store, yet they sit quietly by while their contractors propose cuts to vital benefits for the janitors who clean their facilities," said Denise Solis, SEIU Local 1877 Northern California Vice President. "Ultimately, both Safeway and their individual contractors are responsible for ensuring quality jobs, safe food, and healthy communities."

In the wake of the work stoppage, janitors vow to continue to mobilize against the contractors' proposed benefit cuts and unfair intimidation of workers, and speak out against Safeway's silence on the issues.

While more bargaining dates between SEIU-USWW and the Safeway contractors are set for the coming weeks, the janitors may vote soon on whether or not to authorize their bargaining committee to call an unfair labor practice strike.

SOURCE SEIU United Service Workers West, Local 1877