



Twin Cities security officers stage first-ever strike

By Barb Kucera, Workday editor
25 February 2008

MINNEAPOLIS - Security officers employed by the three largest security contractors in the Twin Cities staged a one-day strike Monday – the first-ever walkout by these workers in history.

Members of Service Employees International Union Local 26 struck several downtown office buildings protected by Securitas, American Security, and ABM. They picketed and rallied Monday and were joined by union and community members and elected officials.

"Today is a one-day strike because today we are showing we are serious about our profession," Local 26 President Javier Morillo told participants in a Minneapolis rally. "We will be going back to work tomorrow, but make no mistake – if this needs to get bigger, then it's gonna get bigger!"

Morillo said "Union members across the city are honoring picketlines" and deliveries into the buildings were being halted. The North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters reported that many of its members who perform remodeling and repair in buildings were refusing to cross picketlines.



Security officers and supporters picketed early Monday morning in downtown St. Paul (above). At a rally later that morning in Minneapolis, U.S. Senate candidate Al Franken (below, center) joined the workers.



Security officers voted Feb. 9 to authorize their bargaining committee to call a strike over unfair labor practices. About 750 officers, who have been bargaining for a new contract for several months, have been working without a contract since Jan. 1. A key issue in the bargaining is affordable health care.

Health insurance premiums can be as high as \$835 per month for security officers, the union said. As a result, only 13 security officers - just two percent - are enrolled in the family health insurance offered by their employer. Only 17 percent of security officers are enrolled in any health insurance from their employer.

"Since day one, we have been committed to settling a contract that provides us with affordable health care for ourselves and our families in a responsible manner," said James Matias, a security officer for American Security in Saint Paul. "Unfortunately, the security companies would rather leave our health at risk than work together for solutions."

Elected officials who addressed the strikers voiced support for their effort to attain affordable health care.

"I'm so proud to be out here with you, standing up for what is really a Minnesota issue," said state Rep. Paul Thissen, DFL-Minneapolis.

Added Minneapolis City Council member Cam Gordon, "I call on all of our community leaders, all our businesses and all the workers to stand with you."

At a rally in St. Paul, City Council member Dave Thune said, "You cover 80 percent of the buildings in our downtowns. You are the people we depend on . . . We're going to help you get decent wages and good health care."

A representative of the security companies urged Local 26 not to take any further strike action and disagreed with the union's characterization of Saturday's negotiation session.

"We will meet again March 6 to continue to hammer out the issues with the help of a mediator," said Guy Thomas, the security companies' representative. "Each company is working to develop an affordable health plan for the families of our employees. We urge the union to let the labor relations process work before staging any strikes or walkouts.

"Job actions are not in the interest of our employees or the businesses we all serve. Our companies also want a collective bargaining agreement as soon as possible."