



















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# Janitors' contract expires; talks go on

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT    OCTOBER 01, 2012

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MATTHEW J. LEE/GLOBE STAFF

**Hundreds of people turned out to march in East Boston Sunday night to support 14,000 unionized New England janitors.**

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The union contract for 14,000 janitors in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island expired at midnight Sunday, and with negotiations for a new contract still unsettled, the janitors could strike as soon as Monday.

Since late August, the Local 615 of the Service Employees International Union and the Maintenance Contractors of New England, an umbrella organization that represents the companies that hire the union's workers, have been unable to agree to a new contract.

Officials for the union and the contractors declined to comment about specifics of the negotiations, but said that talks continue.

"They're still talking, they're still at the table," said Renee Asher, a spokeswoman for the union. "They're still trying to work something out. We're doing our best to reach an agreement that averts a strike."

Matt Ellis, a spokesman for the contractors, said meetings

with the union continued throughout Sunday and “we will stay all night if we have to.”

After union supporters gathered for a Mass at a church in East Boston Sunday night, representatives of Local 615 distributed fliers that said the union asks members to report to work on Monday “unless otherwise notified.”

That Mass followed a vigil held at LoPresti Park, where more than 300 people gathered and then marched to the Most Holy Redeemer Church to show support for the janitors.

“We still have a long way to go,” Sylvia Clarke, 61, a janitor and union bargaining committee member said as she marched to the church Sunday evening. “We don’t want to strike but we’re prepared to if we need to.”

The janitors, who work in many prominent Boston buildings, including the Globe’s offices, are seeking increased hours so more workers qualify as full-time employees eligible for health insurance and other benefits.

Janitors have said that employers have avoided giving part-time workers enough hours to qualify for health insurance. The contractors have denied that assertion and said they have offered more full-time jobs now than when the current contract began in 2007.

Two-thirds of the union’s members work less than the 30 hours weekly needed to be eligible for the health benefit, and one quarter of them are within two hours of reaching that threshold, union officials have said. Many janitors are on state health insurance.

Clarke, a mother of four adult sons and one grandson, said she has no health insurance. She said she has been trying to work more hours at her cleaning job at an office building in Lowell. But she has been scheduled for only 19½ hours a week for the past year.

“It’s very hard for all of us because groceries and food are more expensive now,” she said. “We deserve a chance at the American Dream. We’re not asking for much.”

Union members at the park listened to speeches in English and Spanish. Some wore stickers that said “Ready to strike.”

State Treasurer Steven Grossman attended the vigil to voice his support for the union. “The most important

thing we need to give people is fair pay and respect,” he said.

At the church, Bishop Robert F. Hennessey said Mass before a full church.

“To work for justice, to fight for justice is not something we should be doing, but something we have to be doing as Catholics,” he said in English.

Three churchgoers then held mops and brooms before the altar as the bishop offered a blessing. The fliers distributed after Mass also listed times and locations for several union member assemblies scheduled to be held on Monday.

Should the janitors strike, the contractors plan to use managers and temporary workers to clean the buildings.

*Matt Rocheleau can be reached at [matthew.rocheleau@globe.com](mailto:matthew.rocheleau@globe.com).*

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