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City's Doormen Reach New Labor Agreement

By JULIE TURKEWITZ APRIL 11, 2014

Averting what would have been their first strike in nearly 25 years, the union representing 30,000 building service employees said on Friday that they had reached a tentative labor deal with the Realty Advisory Board on Labor Relations, which represents building owners.

Under the deal, a typical New York City doorman or porter in a unionized building would make \$49,402 by 2018, a jump from the current annual pay of \$44,389. The increase would go into effect incrementally over four years.

The new contract will go into effect on April 20, as long as it is ratified by members from both sides. It covers employees working in more than 3,000 residential buildings as doormen, porters, handymen and building superintendents.

Héctor Figueroa, president of Local 32BJ S.E.I.U., said the contract would allow workers to “continue to live in the city where they work.”

The last strike of building service workers was in 1991 and lasted 12 days — leaving behind memories of piles of uncollected garbage where picket lines had been set up.

The workers’ contract is renewed every four years, and the current one expires April 20. With that date approaching, management in some buildings had begun posting signs that instructed tenants on what to do in case of a strike.

In a city full of low-wage work, with erratic hours and little job security, building service positions have long been viewed as solid positions that allow immigrants and residents with limited education a middle-class life.

Mayor Bill de Blasio made support of this ascendant middle class a central tenet of his campaign, and Mr. Figueroa said that the new contract “speaks loudly about that vision.”

The new deal keeps in place the current benefits package, which includes a 401(k) with employer contribution and a family health care plan — “something enjoyed by fewer and fewer workers,” said the Realty Advisory Board president, Howard Rothschild.

Many building owners have greatly benefited from rising rents in the four years since the last contract was reached, making it hard from a public relations standpoint to deny the union’s request for a raise.

“The real estate industry is doing pretty well,” said Donald Killings, 55, a doorman on the Upper West Side. “And we came organized.”

Mr. Killings said that his job allowed him to buy a home in Jamaica, Queens, 18 years ago. He recently fell behind on his \$1,200 monthly mortgage payment, however, and he said he was looking forward to a pay increase. “It was getting pretty rough,” he said.

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