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Security guards' rally to push contract talks

By Molly Selvin, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
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To jump-start stalled contract negotiations, newly unionized security guards in Los Angeles have authorized a strike vote and plan to rally today in Westwood in front of the offices of two major property management firms.

Talks began in July on what the Service Employees International Union hopes will be the first citywide master agreement for the 4,000 men and women who guard the city's office buildings.

The five property management firms that serve more than 80% of commercial real estate in Los Angeles County have repeatedly canceled scheduled bargaining sessions, according to officials with SEIU Security Officers United in Los Angeles 2006, the local representing the guards.

"They've been disrespectful about coming to the table in a timely manner," said Faith Culbreath, president of the local. "We will not go into another holiday season with conditions being the way they are right now."

A priority for the union is closing the gap in hourly pay and benefits between security guards and janitors working for the same contractors and in the same buildings. Currently, janitors covered by SEIU contracts earn \$6 an hour more than guards, who average between \$8 and \$9 an hour and generally receive no health insurance, vacation pay or other benefits, Culbreath said.

Today's rally will target the Los Angeles headquarters of Douglas Emmett Realty Advisors and G.E. Arden Real Estate. Janitors and local clergy planned to march alongside security officers, said Terrence Long, a union spokesman.

An Arden spokeswoman declined to comment on the negotiations or the planned rally and calls to Douglas Emmett Realty were not returned.

The rally comes on the heels of the union's vote last week to authorize a strike in the event bargaining talks break down completely.

The security guard-organizing drive began five years ago and has the support of many politicians, including City Council members, state legislators and Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.