



**City of Seattle**  
Seattle City Council

## NEWS RELEASE

**Councilmember Kshama Sawant**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

March 16, 2023

**Contact:**

Bia Lacombe, Office of Councilmember Sawant  
(719) 648-2494

# Councilmember Sawant Congratulates MLK Labor Council Call for National Action to Defend Right to Strike

*“The kind of organizing done by the rank-and-file members of twelve union locals alongside Workers Strike Back is exactly what we need not only to defend our right to strike, but to build a militant labor movement—one that is based on a class struggle strategy and that will build powerful strike actions to shut down the bosses’ profit machine and win historic victories for the working class.”*

**SEATTLE** - [Councilmember Kshama Sawant](#) (District 3, Central Seattle) congratulated the delegates to the Martin Luther King Jr. County (MLK) Labor Council who organized and won a crucial vote last night, calling on the AFL-CIO to urgently set a date for a National Day of Action to defend the right to strike.

Last year, the right-wing Supreme Court repealed *Roe v. Wade*, and dismantled our [hard-won](#) abortion rights. Now, workers' right to strike is under attack from big business and the Supreme Court. In a case called *Glacier NW v. Teamsters Local 174*, the Court is shamefully preparing to make unions pay for the economic losses to business when workers go on strike.

Sawant commended the work of rank-and-file union members and **twelve union locals** that first passed the [resolution](#) among their membership, and brought it to the MLK Labor Council. The resolutions urge local, state, and national days of action to fight against the attack on workers' right to strike. The union locals that passed the resolution are WFSE Local 1495 (UW workers), IATSE Local 15 (stagehands), UAW Local 4121 (academic workers and research scientists at UW), Musicians Union Local 76-493, Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action, National Writers Union Northwest Region, AFGE Local 3197 (VA healthcare workers), Pride At Work, Book Workers Union (Elliott Bay

Books), AFSCME Local 2083 (City librarians), WFSE Local 889 (state social workers), and AFGE 1110 (Federal EPA workers).

“Strikes are the principal and most powerful weapon that workers have under capitalism to confront the bosses and demand improvements in working-class standards of living and working conditions. That’s exactly why corporations are trying to undermine it. If bosses can recoup their lost profits by suing unions in the courts, it will not only have a chilling effect on strike action but will undermine the key reason why strikes are so powerful—they shut down production and bring profits of the exploitative bosses to a halt,” Sawant said. “This is another reminder that the courts and the political establishment represent the interests of bosses, not workers, and that workers need to organize a fightback based on class struggle.”

“The kind of organizing done by the rank-and-file members of twelve union locals alongside Workers Strike Back is exactly what we need not only to defend our right to strike, but to build a militant labor movement—one that is based on a class struggle strategy and that will build powerful strike actions to shut down the bosses’ profit machine and win historic victories for the working class,” Sawant continued.

Sawant urged union members and their unions around the country to pass [similar resolutions](#), and join the growing demand for national action against the Supreme Court’s expected anti-union decision in *Glacier Northwest, Inc. v. International Brotherhood of Teamsters*.

Later this spring, the Supreme Court is expected to issue a decision in *Glacier Northwest, Inc. vs International Brotherhood of Teamsters*, which came out of the 2017 strike by members of Seattle-based Teamsters Local 174. The Teamster concrete drivers struck Glacier Northwest over the company’s rampant workplace abuse and intransigence in contract negotiations. The company has asked the High Court for the right to sue the union for economic damages as a result of the strike.

“This court case revolves around the brave actions of our union siblings in Seattle, whose strike I unambiguously supported. But let’s be clear: the lawsuit is aimed at cutting the knees out from all workers who seek to fight for better working conditions by going on strike,” said Sawant, a rank-and-file member of the American Federation of Teachers Local 1789. “If bosses are allowed to recoup losses from a strike by suing unions, it will undermine the central power of a strike, which is the ability of workers to bring profits to a halt. That’s why it’s so important that delegates to our labor council voted overwhelmingly, with 96 percent in support, to call for AFL-CIO leadership to organize national action. I urge MLK Labor leaders to also set a date for a local day of action at the federal courthouse in Seattle, which Workers Strike Back and my office are ready to support in any way we can. We need to raise the alarm bells that this court case is an attack on all of us, and we need to unite and fight back.”

Last night’s Labor Council resolution (also below) is believed to be the first resolution by a regional labor body in the nation to demand a National Day of Action to defend the right to strike.

**Sawant noted that MLK Labor’s action is significant also because there has been little discussion by most leadership of the labor movement about the threat posed by the *Glacier Northwest* case. “That’s why rank-and-file union members have to pressure our national organizations to act,” she said.**

Sawant pointed out that this latest assault on worker rights comes in the immediate aftermath of the Biden administration and Congress banning railroad workers from going on strike.

She also noted that the labor council’s resolution says, “*Glacier Northwest* assault isn’t simply a partisan attack on workers, even though we recognize that the US Supreme Court is stacked with Republican appointees, but it’s part of a long-term erosion of our rights due to the combined actions of big business and the political establishment of both major parties.”

“I agree with the resolution language that calls out both the Democrats and Republicans for failing to defend workers’ rights,” Sawant said. “As the resolutions passed by local unions explain, this is a bipartisan attack, with Biden-appointed justice Ketanji Brown Jackson comparing striking workers to “arsonists”. That’s why we must build an independent, grassroots movement of workers to defend the right to strike, and that’s also why Workers Strike Back is calling for a new party for the working class.”

### **Selected workers’ statements in support of right to strike resolution:**

#### ***Logan Swan, member, Ironworkers Local 86***

“The bosses have been squeezing us for decades and are increasingly alarmed at recent organized expressions of just how fed up we are, like the strikes of carpenters and UAW workers and the new organizing at Starbucks and Amazon. They’re desperately trying to beat us to the punch with this court case against our sisters and brothers in Teamsters Local 174. We need to issue a decisive rebuke like the unions in Ontario, Canada did when faced with similar draconian measures last year. Some 55,000 workers walked off the job and the political establishment blinked. Workers everywhere need organized labor to rise to the occasion, and this resolution is an excellent first step forward.”

#### ***Brent McFarlane, former vice president, IFPTE 2001/SPEEA***

“This year a corporate pandering SCOTUS majority decided to take on the *Glacier Northwest* case aimed at undermining every union's long sacrificed, fought for and won, federally protected right to strike. We should all be prepared to stand in solidarity against this and future attacks on our collective rights as workers.”

#### ***Margaret McCauley, AFGE 1110 (EPA), delegate to MLK Labor Council***

“Even though I, as a federal employee, do not have the right to strike, I believe I should and that indeed every worker should. Without the right to peacefully remove one's labor, there is no ability to ensure that one has safe working conditions and a livable wage. Strikes are a last

resort. Without them as an option it is possible to ignore forever the attempts of employees to make their organization better.”

***Elijah Pasco, communications coordinator, Book Workers Union***

“For the Supreme Court to even consider granting employers the right to sue unions for economic losses during a strike is an insult and unwarranted attack on every worker. This case would set a dangerous legal precedent for labor rights by nullifying the power of the right to strike and further eroding the already limited protections of workers. An injury to one is an injury to all! The Book Workers Union stands in solidarity with Teamsters Local 174 for exercising their right to strike and stands in solidarity with all of labor to fight and protect the right to strike.”

**Resolution adopted 3/15/23 by Martin Luther King County Labor Council delegates:**

**Resolution: Tell the US Supreme Court, Big Business, and Corporate Politicians: Hands Off Our Right to Strike!**

WHEREAS, the right to strike is a fundamental human right and is the most powerful weapon in the hands of workers, and union siblings have fought bravely over the years in numerous battles in the streets and in legislatures to win, defend, and exercise this fundamental democratic right; and

WHEREAS, in the last two years we have seen an upsurge of workers striking—in healthcare, manufacturing, education, transportation, construction, and in new organizing campaigns including coffee workers and warehouse workers; and

WHEREAS, our labor movement has proudly stood with these and other workers as they struck to demand and secure their fundamental rights including good pay and working conditions; and

WHEREAS, the bosses, corporations, and their representatives on the US Supreme Court, recognizing the power of strikes, have always tried to deny or erode the right of workers to strike, through fear tactics; by hiring replacement workers, seeking court injunctions, and trying to pass new laws that limit or outlaw strikes; and even through acts of violence against workers; and

WHEREAS, these attacks on the right to strike, while often aimed at individual groups of workers, are in fact attacks against all of us, since An Injury to One Is an Injury to All; and

WHEREAS, now in 2023, corporations are mounting their most vicious assault on our right to strike in decades, demanding that the U.S. Supreme Court allow employers to sue unions for economic damages resulting from strikes; and

WHEREAS, this case, *Glacier Northwest, Inc. vs International Brotherhood of Teamsters*, which was argued before the U.S. Supreme Court this January, with an expected Court decision to be issued this spring, comes out of the 2017 strike by our union siblings at Teamsters Local 174, who bravely struck Glacier Northwest over the company’s rampant abuse and intransigence in negotiating a fair contract, and in doing so were standing up for the rights of all construction workers to fair treatment and good working conditions; and

WHEREAS, the company is insisting it should have the right to sue the union for economic damages even though the union concrete workers, in effectuating the strike, returned the concrete mixing trucks to the work yard and kept them running to ensure that the wet concrete would not damage the trucks; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Supreme Court in 1959 affirmed that employers do not have the right to sue workers or unions for economic damage if the workers are engaging in a lawful strike, or even in a strike that is “arguably” lawful, unless the National Labor Relations Board has found the strike to be unprotected; and

WHEREAS, corporate interests now want to overturn this 63-year-old precedent and are demanding the unlimited right to sue striking workers for economic damages, because they realize this will be a potent weapon to wield against unions everywhere; and

WHEREAS, while the particular facts of the legal case involve our Teamsters 174 union siblings, this legal case represents an attack on all of us as an adverse decision will impact all workers and would open the door to bosses filing lawsuits against workers any time they strike, thereby empowering employers, intimidating workers, and preempting strike activities; and

WHEREAS, unions are crucial bulwarks against racism, sexism, transphobia, and other attacks on workers; Black workers have the highest rate of union membership among any racial or ethnic group; Black union workers' wages are more than 16 percent higher than their non-union counterparts and they are more than 17 percentage points more likely to have employer-provided health insurance; and the right to strike is critical to maintaining and improving upon these benefits and for fighting racism and other forms of discrimination in the workplace; and therefore an attack on the right to strike, no matter what the source, is an attack on our Black, non-white, women, and LGBTQ siblings; and

WHEREAS, many workers are not yet aware of this dangerous assault on our rights, and we have a duty to educate one another about this attack and mobilize ourselves and our fellow workers to speak out and take action; and

WHEREAS, the *Glacier Northwest* assault on our rights unfortunately isn't an isolated case, but comes in the immediate aftermath of the Biden administration and Congress banning railroad workers using the sharpest tool, the strike, to fight for a contract that included reasonable sick days; and

WHEREAS, the *Glacier Northwest* assault isn't simply a partisan attack on workers, even though we recognize that the US Supreme Court is stacked with Republican appointees, but it's part of a long-term erosion of our rights due to the combined actions of big business and the political establishment of both major parties;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT MLK Labor commits to educate our members and participate in mobilizing to fight back against this attack on our fundamental rights, by putting materials on our website, in newsletters, and by discussing it at union meetings; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT MLK Labor convenes affected unions to develop tactics and strategies to raise our voices and demonstrate our collective denunciation of the corporate assault, aided by the U.S. Supreme Court, on our fundamental rights; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT MLK Labor forwards this resolution to the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, calling for a day of coordinated actions in our state, and also to the National AFL-CIO, calling for a National Day of Action for the Right to Strike well in advance of the US Supreme Court's expected date of issuing a ruling in *Glacier Northwest*.

**Local unions that adopted [resolutions](#) in the last three weeks urging the labor council to take action:**

1. AFGE Local 3197 (VA hospital workers)
2. National Writers Union
3. WFSE Local 1495 (UW workers)
4. UAW 4121 (UW academic workers)
5. Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action (PSARA)
6. IATSE Local 15 (stagehands)
7. Musicians Union Local 76-493
8. Pride At Work
9. Book Workers Union
10. AFSCME Local 2083 (City librarians)
11. WFSE Local 889 (state social workers)
12. AFGE 1110 (Federal EPA workers)

###