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Alleging mistreatment, low wages and poor working conditions, a group of striking workers recently protested outside of the Target Cooperation headquarters in downtown Minneapolis.

The striking workers, most of them people of color, claim Target and other retailers such as K-Mart are turning a blind eye to the treatment of contracted janitorial workers. The workers are employed by various cleaning companies who have contracts with the retail giant. Among the allegations are workers being forced to work as much as 70 hours a week without being paid for their overtime and being routinely locked inside closed department stores overnight.

Royce Reeder, who has been contracted to clean stores such as Target and K-Mart for the past 17 years, said the poor working conditions and low wages were not always the case.

"When I first started with Target (as a contracted worker) they were fighting with us," said Reeder, who said at one point he was making as much as $16 an hour, but now earns between $8 - $9 an hour. "Now they're not on our side anymore."

According to Reeder, who works for Diversified Maintenance, contractors are understaffing projects while raking in huge profits with contracts as high as $150,000 per store. He said it is common for a staff of three to be responsible for cleaning an entire store. He also claims he has been promised a raise for the past three years, but has yet to receive one.

"Wages are just going down and down," said Reeder.

Molly Snyder, a spokesperson with Target, said if the workers have a gripe it is with the companies for which they work; not Target.

"Target contracts with regional vendors to provide housekeeping services for all our stores and, as such, we do not employ the individuals involved in (the protest)," said Snyder. "At Target, we are committed to maintaining the highest standards of ethical business practices and we expect our vendors to do the same."

According to Snyder, though stores are locked overnight, workers can exit the building in case of emergency.

"Each store is equipped with well-marked fire exits and all individuals who work in our stores, whether they are employed by Target or a vendor, are given a tour of Target where all exits are identified," said Snyder.

Brian Payne of Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha (CTUL), which translates to the Center of Workers United in the Struggle, said Target is well aware of the plight of workers cleaning its stores, but chooses to do nothing.

"Target's CEO has the power with one phone call to change things," said Payne. "Target is skirting the issue."

According to Payne, Target CEO Gregg Steinhafel received $19.7 million in compensation in

2011, while some of the janitors are paid $7.25 an hour, and often work for more than 70 hours a week without being paid overtime. Payne said cleaning companies often force workers to sign "ghost" timecards to avoid paying overtime.

Protesting alongside striking workers were members of CTUL, TakeAction Minnesota, SEIU Local 26, Minnesotans for a Fair Economy and ISAIAH.