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Apple will replace contract security guards with full-time employees in Silicon Valley

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Apple will replace a number of contract security positions with direct hires for its Silicon Valley operations, amid widespread demands from contract workers like drivers and security guards for better working conditions at tech companies.

The move by Apple comes in the wake of growing concerns about inequality in Silicon Valley, arising largely from the gentrification and high-costs in the area driven by the influx of hi-tech employees.

In October, Google said it would employ on its payroll security guards, rather than have them placed by a contractor, shortly after a report in August by community labor organization Working Partnerships USA that highlighted the poor working conditions of janitors, security guards and other contract staff, supplied by third-party companies, that are used extensively by tech companies in the valley.

“We will be hiring a large number of full-time people to handle our day-to-day security needs,” an Apple spokeswoman wrote Tuesday in an email. “We hope that virtually all of these positions will be filled by employees from our current security vendor and we’re working closely with them on this process.”

Apple has been under pressure previously to improve the working conditions of contract workers. The decision to hire people directly for key onsite security roles was the result of a comprehensive, year-long review of its security program, according to the company. It did not comment on why it had changed its policy on hiring security guards.

The company’s decision was welcomed by United Service Workers West, which described it as “a victory for Silicon Valley security officers who are rising up to fix the imbalance in our economy by securing dignified, full-time work and respect on the job.” The organization, a part of the Service Employees International Union, claims to represent over 40,000 janitors, security officers and other property service workers in California.

Apple, Facebook and other tech companies are also facing demands for better working conditions from shuttle drivers. Drivers of Compass International, the contractor which has service agreements with tech companies like Apple, Yahoo, eBay, and Zynga, last week decided to unionize with Teamsters Local 853 in San Leandro.

Last month, Loop Transportation drivers, who transfer Facebook employees to and from the company's Menlo Park campus, reached an agreement with the contractor that, besides other benefits, could increase their average pay to US\$24.50 an hour from the current \$18 an hour. The agreement was sent to Facebook for approval as the paying client. They drivers had in November voted to be represented by the Teamsters.

Silicon Valley's 'invisible' workers do not share in the success of the tech industry, which they labor daily to keep running, the Working Partnerships USA report said. Tech companies in the valley were charged with using underpaid black, Latino and immigrant contract workers as landscaping workers, janitors, cooks and security guards.

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John Ribeiro covers outsourcing and general technology breaking news from India for the IDG News Service.

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