

# ...2,306 Precision Castparts workers eligible to vote

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else. "We're going to be a family, all together."

For years, Machinists District Lodge W-24 has kept in touch with a committee of union supporters at the company. But interest in unionization spiked last year, says Machinists Grand Lodge Representative Mike Rose, as PCC workers increasingly contacted the IAM web site asking to join the union. Rose attributes the increased interest to management mistreatment, rising health plan co-pays and deductibles, skimpy bonuses, and a company decision to replace the traditional defined benefit pension with a 401(k) for new hires. But the biggest issue, lately, has been mandatory overtime. PCC phased out new hiring a year ago, Rose said, and is responding to booming demand with frequent short-notice requirements to work extra shifts on weekends.

"People can't plan when they spend time with family, and when they do, they have to cancel the plans."

At the meeting, workers speak of another reason to want a union: Self-respect.

"They told us they could go to 7/11 or Walmart to replace us," says a PCC worker at the organizing meeting.

"If they could do that," Rose replies, "they already would have done it. You have a skill."

PCC, or PCP as it's listed on the New York Stock Exchange, is doing well, and can afford to give raises. In its most recent annual report to shareholders, it reported earnings of \$1.2 billion on \$7.2 billion in sales, and paid its CEO, Mark

Donegan, \$11.5 million in total compensation. Company sales rose 32 percent in two years.

The annual report also describes "satisfactory" relations with unions: Collective bargaining agreements cover 22 percent of PCC's global workforce of 21,480, and 12 of those agreements, covering 11 percent of the workforce, are up for renegotiation this fiscal year.

But at its Portland-area facilities, PCC is fighting unionization.

When the Machinists union made overtures to workers last October, the company responded with three days of mandatory meetings, Rose said. The company appears to be running a by-the-book anti-union campaign, advised by The Burke Group, an anti-union consultancy based in Malibu, California.

The campaign relies on fear, Rose said — threats and intimidation. Human resource managers and company engineers are out on the shop floor talking to workers one-on-one. Supervisors with clipboards go around and ask workers which way they're voting. And in mandatory-attendance meetings, managers sow doubts about the union — how high dues will be, how uncertain the prospects for getting a better deal. Though Oregon law bars employers from disciplining workers for not attending such meetings, it's not clear workers want to test the law by defying an order to attend. But judging by workers' accounts at the or-

ganizing meeting, there is some push-back at those anti-union meetings.

"The first thing I asked the union-buster," said one worker, "was, 'Do you have a contract?' Yeah? Well, there you go. We want one too."

In the organizing meeting, workers want answers to things they've heard in the workplace anti-union meetings. Is it true that they could lose what they have now, in a negotiation?

No, Rose says. Legally, the presumption is that the status quo is the starting point in negotiations. By law, once a union is voted in, an employer can't change wages or working conditions without bargaining over it. Why would employees vote to accept a reduction? For that matter, why would the company propose it? After all, before the union came along, the company had total freedom to set wages. The wages they make now are set by the company. And as Rose put it, "If they could pay you less, they would."

"I personally feel that at the worst, we would have what we've got now," said another worker, "but we'd know at least that we'd have that until the next contract." Without a contract, all wages and working conditions are subject to change, over which workers have no say.

Rose hopes PCC workers will join the union family this time. Previous attempts by workers to unionize failed in the 1970s and again in 1995 and 1996. In July 1995, the United Steelworkers lost

689 to 763. In the wake of the loss, the National Labor Relations Board investigated and concluded that the company had violated federal labor law in the course of its anti-union campaign. So egregious were the violations that the agency ordered the election results overturned and a new election scheduled. But PCC appealed the order to the agency's five-member board in Washington, D.C. Rather than wait for the outcome of the appeal, the Steelworkers requested a second election a year later. This time, the union lost 573 to 1,127.

The Burke Group advised PCC last time around, too. Rose says Precision has violated labor law, though the union has not yet made that case to the National Labor Relations Board. One such violation — if the union can substantiate it — is a management threat to shut down and move to South Carolina.

"In '96, it was the same threat," Rose tells the Labor Press. "At that time, they had bought a potato field in eastern Washington and were going to move the plant there."

If the 2,306 PCC workers join the Machinists, it would be a major expansion for District Lodge W24, which had 6,525 members as of its most recent annual report. Aiding the pro-union worker committee is the entire District Lodge staff, plus staff from the Oregon AFL-CIO, and dozens of member volunteers from Boeing. After filing April 12 for an election, the union received a legally-mandated employee list May 1, and began a campaign of home visits May 6. Rose said the campaign hopes to have a conversation with every worker before the June 6-7 election.



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