UNION ORGANIZING

At Precision Castparts, Machinists campaign to organize 'micro-union'

This time, they seek to represent a group of 102 welders

By Don McIntosh

International Association of Machinists (IAM) is making another effort to unionize at Precision Castparts. But unlike four years ago, when the company's Portland-area workers rejected unionization in a 1,258 to 932 vote, this time the union is trying to organize just one slice of the workforce: a group of 102 welders.

That's possible thanks to a 2011 decision by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) in a case called *Specialty Healthcare*. NLRB is the federal agency responsible for interpreting and enforcing the federal law that covers private sector unionization.

You might think that since the law recognizes workers' right to unionize, it would be up to the union or the workers themselves to decide which occupational classifications or departments they want to include in their union. But the law gives employers the right to argue over what's an "appropriate bargaining unit" and it gives the NLRB the authority to decide that question based on its judgment of whether the workers have a "community of interest." In its *Specialty Healthcare* decision, the agency gave workers and unions greater latitude to form what business groups derided as "micro-units."

Business groups have thundered in outrage at the ruling ever since, and it's expected that the decision will be overturned if and when President Trump's nominees to the NLRB are confirmed by the U.S. Senate.

But for now, Precision Castparts welders may get a chance to vote on a union just for them. The workers weld titanium and steel cast parts for aerospace medical devices and other uses, for clients like GE or Rolls Royce. Precision Castparts has been a subsidiary of Berkshire Hathaway since 2015.

In a three-day hearing that concluded July 28, lawyers for Precision Castparts argued that a "wall-to-wall" unit of all production and maintenance employees is most appropriate. Machinists District Lodge W24 organizer Will Lukens says he hopes to see a decision on it by the end of August. If it goes in the union's favor, a vote could take place as soon as September.

Honoring Workers this Labor Day

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