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COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Strike at Springfield hospital

By Don McIntosh

Over 300 hospital support workers held a five-day strike Dec. 6 to 11 at McKenzie-Willamette Hospital in Springfield, Oregon, in part to protest a decision to outsource laundry, food service, and housekeeping. About 70 union members in those departments were told they'd have to re-apply for their jobs, and officially became employees of a contractor, Texas-based HHS, on Dec. 5. They continue to make the same wages and remain members of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 49, but will have to negotiate a separate contract with HHS. And their benefits are being slashed.

Dietary clerk Kristi Green, one of the outsourced workers, has worked at the hospital 17 years. She said paid time off offered by HHS is a fraction of what she had before, and the new health insurance doesn't include any local providers.

Meanwhile, in contract bargaining, Local 49 and McKenzie-Willamette are far apart on



wages. The hospital wants pay to be based on "market" rates that it gleaned from the web sites Glassdoor.com and Indeed.com. It's also proposing that workers pay 30% of the premium for health insurance, up from 7% currently.

McKenzie-Willamette, owned by Tennessee-based corporation Quorum Health Corp., is one of only two for-profit hospitals in Oregon.



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