



Pocono Medical Center service workers rally for union

Key issue in talks: Keeping closed shop

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Their message was clear: They wanted a closed shop.

Pocono Medical Center service employees — including maintenance and cafeteria workers, technicians and nursing assistants — all of whom belong to the same union, rallied Tuesday in East Stroudsburg because they want the hospital to respect their desire for a closed shop.

In a closed shop, workers are required to join the union — in this case the Service Employees International Union. Hospital service workers have voted nearly 2-to-1 for a closed shop.

The workers who showed up to the rally Tuesday said a closed shop gives the union more bargaining power. Management at PMC has made an open shop one of its negotiating points.

And that's why workers were rallying Tuesday.

"When we have a closed shop, we're stronger, we have more job security. And who doesn't want a little more job security in today's economy?" said Jackie Ryan, a gastroenterology technician who's worked at PMC for 11 years.

About 100 SEIU members attended the rally in a parking lot near St. Matthew's Catholic Church in East Stroudsburg.

PMC service workers who showed up to the rally said the scales would be too heavily tipped in management's favor if service workers were denied a closed shop, which they've had for the last three years.

"It would be like divide and conquer. If we don't have a strong union, we're at management's whims," said Christine Muncaster, a secretary who works in PMC's emergency room.

Nurses at the hospital are represented by another union and are not involved in this matter. However, service employees — there are 550 in all — make up the majority of the staff at the hospital.

"We're the backbone of the hospital," said Ann Ross, who works in housekeeping.

PMC management has offered these workers a 9 percent raise over three years and free health care at the hospital as part of an employee benefits package. But the closed shop must go, management says.

Members of the union at the rally said those benefits and pay raises were all well and good, but they are most concerned about the closed shop.

SEIU leaders said that they were not urging their members to strike. The union will continue to negotiate with the hospital to try and get the closed shop as part of the contract.

Geoffrey Roche, a spokesman for PMC, said Tuesday that the hospital was still against a closed shop for these workers.