

CHICAGO TEAMSTERS JOINT COUNCIL 25



NEWS»

GOV. QUINN JOINS SK HAND TOOLS STRIKE

Local 743 Welcomes State Leader to Fight Over Lost Benefits

Five days following Teamsters Joint Council 25's endorsement of Pat Quinn for Illinois governor, the state leader and labor supporter joined striking workers on Chicago's south side.

After voting unanimously to strike late last month, Teamsters at SK Hand Tools in Chicago and McCook continue to protest the company's unilateral withdrawal of employee health coverage without warning. As contract negotiations have stalled, Gov. Quinn joined the picket line in support of approximately 75 workers represented by Teamsters Local 743.

"When [workers] go to the doctor and find out their health insurance has been yanked by their employer, that's not right," Quinn said. "We know it's not right. And that's why we're on strike."

The National Labor Relations Board has already issued an unfair labor practice complaint against SK Hand Tools, alleging illegal bargaining over management's stoppage of health care coverage with no advanced notice. The company has also been behind on its payments to the workers' pension fund. According to Richard Berg, President of Local 743, the French-owned employer has not made regular payments since February.

"At a time when SK Hand Tools is defying its workers' right to a contract by attempting to hire non-union employees, the support of Gov. Quinn is sincerely appreciated by the Teamsters," said John T. Coli, President of Teamsters Joint Council 25. "We want to send a clear message to this company that all workers deserve proper health coverage and fair treatment in the workplace."

In addition to its move to force employees to cover their health insurance out-of-pocket, management at SK Hand Tools is currently bargaining for a 20 percent pay cut for all workers. On average, employees earn \$14 per hour. The pay reduction proposed by management includes a loss of \$4 per hour in the first six months of a new contract, lowering the company's average earnings to just above Illinois' minimum wage.

SK Hand Tools, which has made metal tools in Chicago for 88 years, has been under Teamster representation since 1968. Its merchandise, including Sears Craftsman products, is sold primarily online.

Teamsters Local 743 represents approximately 11,000 hardworking men and women in Chicago, working in the manufacturing, health care, warehouse and clerical industries.