NEWS »

TEAMSTERS WIN HEALTH COVERAGE TO END HAND TOOL STRIKE

Company Offers Insurance, New Contract to Local 743 Members

Holding out for health insurance has paid off for approximately 70 employees of SK Hand Tools, who will return to work on Monday with restored benefits and a new contract.

The members of Teamsters Local 743 had been on strike since the end of August after the company, which manufactures Craftsman products and other tools, unilaterally withdrew employee health coverage without warning. Teamsters and union supporters, including Gov. Pat Quinn, walked the strike line at area plants in Chicago and McCook. Multiple rallies were also held in defense of the workers' rights to secure benefits and wages.

"The Teamsters received significant support in this arduous battle, but it was the might of our members that ultimately held strong to protect these benefits," said Richard Berg, Local 743 President. "At a time when the national health care debate continues, we must take pride in successfully reminding at least one company of the importance of this basic human necessity."

SK Hand Tools had until today to offer the union a proposal for a new contract. In addition to providing health coverage to all workers, the company has agreed to eliminate the temporary workers it hired to replace the Teamsters and resume payments to the employee pension fund. The French-owned company had been behind on its pension payments since the beginning of the year.

According to SK Hand Tools, which admitted production had significantly slowed during the strike, the union workers will be back on the job by Monday.

Local 743, whose members voted overwhelmingly to accept the new contract, has agreed to withdraw unfair labor practice charges filed against SK Hand Tools. The contract will guarantee the workers' restored benefits and wages until October 31, 2012.

SK Hand Tools, which has made metal tools in Chicago for 88 years, has been under Teamster representation since 1968.

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