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Solidarity with N.J. nurses

By Joe Feeney | March 4, 2009

DEPTFORD TOWNSHIP, N.J.--Chanting "Boss says cut back, we say fight back" and "Hey, hey what do you say, 1199 is here to stay," about 130 striking nurses and their supporters carried picket signs and bright yellow union flags at a February 28 rally in front of the Innova Health and Rehab facility in Deptford Township, N.J.

The workers, members of District 1199C, National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees, have been on strike since January 23 at Innova facilities here and in Hammonton, N.J., where employers have said that all strikers will be permanently replaced.

In response, the union mobilized members from District 1199C in Philadelphia and 1199J in Newark, NJ, who arrived in two buses to support the striking nurses at the February 28 rally.

Nurses have been working without a contract since last April. At issue in the strike are Innova's proposals to increase the nurses' health insurance contribution from \$80 per month to \$800 per month, and reduce the company's pension contribution from \$1.25 per hour to 10 cents per hour. Management also wants to end premium pay for weekend shifts.

While there has been a union at the Deptford nursing home since 1986, this is the first contract being negotiated with the new ownership.

Speaking at the rally, Henry Nicholas, president of 1199C, pointed out that the main issue is health care. Also speaking were several local government officials who are also members of unions. Deptford Township Mayor Paul Medany stated: "This is what unions were about from the beginning."

As Medany and other elected officials spoke, township police stood guard on the company side of the picket line, making sure that the strike supporters did not prevent traffic from entering the nursing home's parking lot. After the rally, many drove to Hammonton for a rally at the other struck Innova facility.

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