



Sutter workers 'march on boss'

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A "march on the boss" by Sutter Solano Medical Center union workers this week amid tense contract talks has left more than a dozen workers on administrative leave without pay.

Sutter Solano employees in the SEIU United Healthcare Workers-West union have been working without a contract since June. Workers held a one-day strike in October and the last negotiation session was held Monday.

Around 1 p.m. Wednesday, talks escalated when a group of workers, led by union representative Gloria Watkins, came to Sutter's administrative building to speak with CEO Terry Glubka. The workers hoped to discuss management proposals to possibly lay off a number of workers, scale back raises over the next few years and subcontract out work union employees are currently doing.

Workers were met by Human Resources Director Jean Willhite and other managers who told the workers Glubka was unavailable.

From that point, the two sides' stories diverge as to what happened.

"Most of the employees were following the guidance of their union rep, who was quite aggressive," said Kim Trumbull, Sutter Solano's chief nurse executive. She said the workers "stormed" into the administrative office.

Trumbull, the only administrator answering media questions Thursday, said she was not present until the end of the confrontation but had been told what happened.

Watkins, the union representative, said she was the main person speaking with Willhite while other workers stood behind her.

"They walked in civil and walked out civil," Watkins said.

Willhite directed a non-union employee to videotape the workers in the office, Watkins and Trumbull said.

Watkins said Willhite was urging the employee to make sure he got everyone on film.

"Get her. Get her. Get her," Watkins quoted Willhite as saying.

Trumbull said an employee was asked to film once the group became "disruptive." She would not identify the employee.

Union worker Angie Apodaca said managers were guarding the office doors.

"We were just like wow. You have these people here that have worked for many years, dedicated their lives to this company and you guys are not willing to speak to them," Apodaca said.

But Trumbull said it was inappropriate for the workers to try to speak with the CEO on Wednesday because they did not have an appointment. Management had given the union a set of dates to choose from for a follow-up meeting to Monday's negotiations, but the union had not chosen one or offered its own dates, Trumbull said.

Watkins said she received the dates on Wednesday morning, but workers had decided on Monday to "march on the boss" -- to approach the CEO themselves.

Watkins said the workers chose to come at 1 p.m. when many people would be at lunch or could take a break.

Trumbull said some employees may have still been on the clock.

Because of that, about 13 employees were placed on administrative leave Wednesday, as the hospital investigates whether they did anything wrong.

Trumbull said workers may be guilty of job abandonment for going to the office while on the clock, insubordination or not following standards of behavior.

United Healthcare Workers-West Vice President John Borsos said Sutter is making it "abundantly clear" that it does not care about its workers or the quality of service patients receive.

Borsos said the union contract, which is still in force during negotiations, prohibits the hospital from subcontracting out union workers jobs. Trumbull denies such language exists.

But in section 23 of the union contract, titled "Subcontracting and Mergers", it reads, "The Medical Center commits that, during the term of the 2004-08 Collective Bargaining Agreement, it will not subcontract any work performed by bargaining unit employees..." except when a union worker is not available or the work has not been historically done by a union worker.

Watkins said the work the hospital wants to subcontract is currently being done by union workers.

Watkins and Borsos said it is unfair for workers to be placed on leave for voicing their concerns.

Trumbull said if no wrongdoing is found in the investigation, workers will be paid for missed time.