

THE WHOLE TOWN'S TALKING

ABOUT SHERATON'S EMPTY PROMISES AND PHONEY OFFERS



Pr. George's Sheraton Inn Picketed Over Wage Dispute

By Charles A. Krause
By a Washington Post Staff Writer

About 20 maids and dishwashers picketed the 250-room Sheraton Inn in New Carrollton, Prince George's County, yesterday, attempting to win from the Sheraton's management what would be the first union hotel contract in Washington's Maryland suburbs.

Despite the strike, the hotel appeared to be operating as usual, with management personnel cleaning rooms and washing dishes.

"We (the management) do anything we have to do," said Rudolf M. Lechner, the Sheraton's general manager, who

conceded that the strike has been "inconvenient. I don't think anybody wants a strike."

Ronald R. Richardson, secretary-treasurer of Local 75, Hotel and Restaurant Employees and Bartenders International Union (AFL-CIO), said the strike began Monday after the union and Sheraton management were unable to reach agreement on a contract for the hotel.

Local 75 was recognized last August as the sole bargaining agent for Sheraton Inn employees, Richardson said, and has been negotiating with the hotel's management since then for an initial, two-year contract to cover wages and working conditions.

It was unclear yesterday exactly how many of the Sheraton's 200 employees were on strike beyond the 20 who walked the picket line. Richardson claimed that about 100 of the employees were on strike while Lechner said "It's hard to say because some are on strike and some are afraid to come to work."

So far, both sides agree that there has been no violence or serious incidents, although the hotel has hired at least two private security guards to keep the strikers off hotel property. The picket line is maintained on a sidewalk in front of the hotel, which is located at the intersection of Rte. 450 and the Capital Beltway.

Richardson said that the average Sheraton blue-collar employee earns about \$2 an hour. The union is demanding parity with unionized Washington hotels, which would mean 60-cent-per-hour increase over the course of the two-year contract.

In addition, Richardson said, the union is asking that the hotel improve working conditions for the maids, improve the employees' cafeteria, agree to an antidiscrimination clause in the contract and binding arbitration of any contract grievances.

Lechner refused to comment on any aspects of the proposed contract. "I wouldn't reply to Mr. Richardson's charges. I don't see any reason to negotiate in public," the manager said.

The Prince George's County delegation to the Maryland General Assembly called off its monthly breakfast at the hotel Monday because of the picket lines. "We would have looked pretty stupid as leaders of the Democratic party crossing the picket line," Del. Arthur Dorman (D-Prince George's) said yesterday.

John Gruber, president of the Prince George's County Educators Association, the sole bargaining agent for the county's teachers, lunched at the Sheraton yesterday. Asked if he, as a union leader, regretted crossing the picket line, Gruber replied: "Hell, no. I'm hungry."

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