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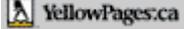
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NEWS STORY

Labatt workers in Montreal area reject company offer to end 11-week strike

Canadian Press

Tuesday, September 02, 2003

LONGUEUIL, Que. (CP) - Labatt Breweries Co. officials were disappointed Tuesday after unionized employees rejected a second contract offer that would have ended an 11-week strike.

Nearly 59 per cent of the 679 workers who participated in the vote turned down the offer. The union's executive had recommended that members reject what Labatt had billed as its final offer.

"We are shocked by the results and by the attitude of the union which recommended its rejection," Labatt spokesman Paul Wilson said at a news conference following the vote.

Workers had rejected another offer earlier this summer.

"We totally responded to all the union's demands, most importantly on pensions," he told reporters.

"So the company went a long way and despite that the union recommended rejection."

About 950 unionized workers walked off the job on June 16.

Subcontracting and equity between temporary and permanent employees remain the two sticking points, said Jean Lortie, president of the Confederation of National Trade Unions that represents Labatt workers.

The brewery has been forced to ship beer from its plants in Ontario and other provinces to shore up supplies drained by the strike at the local facility, south of Montreal.

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Wilson questioned whether the real reason behind the union's action was to flex its muscles for regional employees.

He said the offer was the best in the beer industry and accused the union of misinforming members. Wilson added the offer's strength will be seen when competitors negotiate their contracts early next year.

However, local union president Robert Daneau said the union plans to "intensify its pressure tactics," by becoming more visible to the public.

The company had offered an hourly wage increase of \$4 for permanent employees over seven years, 20 new full-time positions, an improved pension plan and a clause protecting jobs from being subcontracted.

Delivery workers earn an annual income of \$58,900, while maintenance employees make \$62,600.

"You can have a good salary, but if tomorrow morning your employer sells your job for \$7 an hour, it's clear that you don't have good wage conditions," said Lortie.