

Longview mill workers end strike without a contract

The strike is over at the KapStone paper mill and box plant in Longview, Washington. Association of Western Pulp and Paper Workers (AWPPW) Local 153 made an unconditional offer to return to work on Sept. 3 — Day 7 of the strike — and the company accepted the following day. Union President Kurt Gallow said members began returning to work on Labor Day. All 775 were back on the job by Sept. 10, except five who the company accuses of picket-line misconduct.

If KapStone had rejected the return-to-work offer, the strike would have become a lockout, making workers eligible for unemployment insurance benefits.

KapStone Paper and Packaging, headquartered in Illinois, has four paper mills and 6,200 employees. It's the largest kraft paper producer in the United States. After acquiring Longview Fibre in 2013, it proposed concessions from Local 153, a division of United Brotherhood of Carpenters. Union members gave up their defined benefit pension and retiree health benefits in their last contract with Longview Fibre, and were in no mood to accept further cuts.

KapStone declared an impasse in bargaining, and on Aug. 10 imposed its final contract offer. That offer includes raises of 2 percent a year for eight years, but also cuts in health benefits, re-

placing its current full-family health plans with high-deductible versions as of Jan. 1.

On Aug. 27, union workers walked off the job.

The strike initially shut down operations. KapStone said it would use the time to perform maintenance. But on Aug. 31 it restarted the largest of five paper machines using scabs. A second machine started on Sept. 4.

The company brought in security guards to video the picket line. Cowlitz County sheriff's deputies maintained a presence at the mill entrance during shift changes. On Aug. 30, a scab drove his SUV into a picketer. The picketer was taken to a hospital but was unhurt. [See the

video at <http://bit.ly/1fTukYQ>]

Gallow said the strike was called to protest unfair labor practices—violations of the National Labor Relations Act. It's unlawful to hire permanent replacements in an unfair labor practice strike. On Aug. 30, the National Labor Relations Board found merit to several charges filed by the union, including refusal to bargain in good faith and making unilateral changes to working conditions without talking to the union. The charges are scheduled to go before a federal administrative law judge Dec. 8.

The return to work doesn't mean workers have agreed to the company offer. They still have the right to strike again later.

WASHINGTON

Union coalition reaches agreements at Clark County

VANCOUVER, Wash.—Clark County has reached agreement on contracts with four unions covering 700 workers. The three-year agreements provide for across-the-board wage increases of 1.75, 2, and 2 percent and run from July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2018.

The contracts largely maintain existing terms, including health insurance, for which workers pay 7 percent of premiums, a composite rate that covers employees and dependents.

The four unions bargained in a coalition. Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) Local 11 represents 298 members at several agencies; AF-SCME Local 307 represents 200 employees in public works; Professional & Technical Employees Local 17 represents 155 engineers; and Laborers Local 335 represents 54 workers in the county health department.

OPEIU Local 11 representative Maureen Colvin says the Local 11 contract also fixed a source of inequity between new hires and more senior employees over paid time off.

Clark County's sometimes polarized politics played little role in the negotiations. There was an early push to make bargaining sessions open to the public, something Colvin said would have been unproductive, but that was scuttled.

Members of all the unions have ratified the deals. They now await approval of the Board of County Councilors, which could vote on them as early as Sept. 29.

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Sept. 4, in a convoy of five 18-passenger vans with tinted windows. Trucks are also arriving at the plant from ATI's other Albany facility, though not driven by union members.

As the lockout lengthens, USW Local 7150 has begun to reach out to other Oregon unions asking for support. Locked-out workers are entitled to unemployment benefits, but that's far below the income they earn on

the job. The international union is providing strike/lockout benefits that amount to \$200 per member per week; those funds are pooled by the local and distributed on the basis of need.

Leading up to the start of the school year, donations from union and community members provided backpacks and school supplies to 67 children of locked-out workers.

Local elected officials have also been turning up at the picket line to show support, including

Congressman Peter DeFazio, Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian, State Sen. Sara Gelsler, and Albany Mayor Sharon Konopa (who's married to Teamsters Local 305 business agent Steve Konopa). Konopa also asked Albany City Council to pass a resolution of support for the workers, but the other council members preferred a neutral statement urging both sides to resolve the dispute.

Rodgers said one of the biggest things supporters can do

is just stop by the picket line and say hello. "We appreciate all the support we've been getting," Rodgers said. "That means a lot to the members, and helps keep them inspired."

HOW TO HELP

- Drop by the picket line at 530 SW 34th Ave., Albany.
- Send a check for any amount to the USW 7150 Strike and Defense Fund, 1400 Salem Ave., Albany, Oregon, 97321.



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