

...Union-busting at General Distributors

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the union offered to roll the existing contract forward three years — no wage increases, just keep current terms — and go back to work. Company representatives took less than five minutes to reject that offer, then packed up and left, after making it clear that any settlement would have to include retention of the strikebreakers.

Later that day, strikers voted to end their walkout with an unconditional offer to return to work. The company refused to take most of them back, claiming their positions had been filled. Of the 59 union members still honoring the strike on Dec. 2, just 21 have been rehired. Half the remainder are receiving unemployment benefits, and the other half have found other work. As many as 19 General Distributors strikers have been hired by other Teamster employers, such as Sysco, and are earning more than they did at General Distributors.

Workers at General Distributors earn \$16 to \$19.50 per hour under the union contract that expired Nov. 1 — low by union standards, but not low enough for company management. The crux of the dispute is General Distributors' demand for the same terms its competitor

Maletis is getting in a separate contract with Local 162. Maletis distributes Anheuser-Busch beers locally, and Local 162 President Mark Davison says its wages and benefits have always lagged behind General Distributors.

Terms of the old contract are still in force until a new contract is reached, or until bargaining reaches impasse, or until workers vote out the union.

On Dec. 14, the company asked the National Labor Relations Board to conduct an election to see if the union still has majority support among employees. Union supporters have defeated four previous attempts to vote out the union at General Distributors — most recently in 2012, when workers voted 47 to 4 to keep the union. But this time, the company presumably intends to include the workers it hired as striker replacements — and exclude some of the union's strongest supporters, who've been suspended from returning. Local 162 is seeking to block the union election on the grounds that the company violated labor law.

Teamsters Local 162 has represented employees at General Distributors for over 50 years. And General Distributors, owned by the Fick family, had a

reputation for fair dealing until the current dispute. Strikers blame the change on Irwin, who was hired this year as general manager, and on the attorneys the company brought in this year. General Distributors is represented by Ronald Williams of the Lake Oswego law firm Williams & Zografos, and Todd Lyon of the nationally prominent anti-union law firm Fisher & Phillips.

No further contract bargaining sessions were currently scheduled at press time.

The union launched a web site — GeneralDistributorsGreed.com — to tell its side of the story.

UNION BUSTING'S BITTER TASTE

A 1947 anti-union law makes it illegal for the Teamsters to boycott beverages distributed by General Distributors. But nothing prevents Labor Press readers from taking a break from its products until strikers are back on the job. General Distributors distributes the MillerCoors family of beers East of the Willamette River as far as Hood River. Brands include Miller and Coors as well as Corona and Mike's Hard Lemonade. The company also handles many dozens of other beverages, including Arizona Teas, Kombucha Wonder Drink, and V8. The full list is on the company web site at generaldistributors.com.



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