

Workers bolstered by protest convoy

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KELLOGG LOCKOUT: Workers' union says it's ready to talk again; cereal giant says high labour costs hurting London plant

By [KATE DUBINSKI](#), LONDON FREE PRESS

Two days after they rejected a company offer, locked-out workers at Kellogg Canada's London plant got a morale boost from an Ontario Federation of Labour caravan winding its way across the province.

"We're with you in your struggle and we will not tolerate blatant corporate greed," said Patti Dalton, president of the London and District Labour Council.

As more than 200 union members, supporters and their families waved flags and signs and picket placards, the caravan -- on a province wide tour since the start of June to find out how the recession is affecting working people -- pulled up to the Kellogg plant to cheers and shouts.

The 488 Kellogg workers, members of the Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco and Grain Millers union, Local 154-G, were locked out June 5.

Friday, union members voted against a tentative contract agreement that would have given workers a 7% salary increase over three years and improvements to the pension and benefit package.

But it also would have cut more than 100 jobs, eliminating the weekend shift where 105 senior workers work 12 hours Saturday at time-and-a-half pay and 12 hours Sunday at double time. They don't work the rest of the week, having earned the equivalent of 42 hours straight pay.

That would have seen 105 with the least seniority laid off and the rest of the workforce shifted into working weekends on a rotating basis

Union local president Bob Martin told supporters the union wanted to keep working and didn't want to be locked out.

The U.S. cereal giant, based in Battle Creek, Mich., said on the weekend it "regrets the decision" by workers not to accept the offer.

But Martin said the union will continue to fight for an equitable contract.

"This caravan shows you where the labour movement is. People say we're in trouble -- I say we're not," he told the crowd. "My goal is to get back to the table for something we can live with. Battle Creek has our number and we're ready to go back to the table."

London's Kellogg plant makes about 65 million kg. of cereal a year, down from 100 million kg. in 2005.

Kellogg says its goal is to become more competitive "and help ensure its future viability." High labour costs are hurting the plant, it says.

<http://lfpres.ca/newsstand/News/Local/2009/06/22/9883716-sun.html>