# InBev Worker-Exec Standoff Causes Massive Beer Shortage

LEUVEN, Belgium (AP) — The world's largest brewer, Anheuser-Busch InBev SA, shut down production in its home country Wednesday in an escalation of a standoff with workers at its Belgian breweries over job cuts.

Workers began blockading three AB InBev breweries two weeks ago to protest against cutting up to 263 jobs in Belgium as part of plan to reduce the company's European work force by 10 percent.

As the company and unions planned a third round of mediation talks, stores across Belgium said their supplies of such AB InBev brands as Stella Artois, Leffe and Beck's were running low.

Company spokeswoman Karen Coeck said walls of beer crates erected at Belgian AB InBev plants since Jan. 7 have prevented the company from bringing raw materials, empty bottles and packaging goods into the plants.

"Also, the storage facilities are full of beer that cannot be shipped out," Coeck told the VRT radio network.

Unions say AB InBev's worldwide operations yield hefty profits.

Coeck said Belgium, while a country with a passion for beers, is a shrinking market — a trend seen elsewhere, too.

Last November, AB InBev reported $1.55 billion net profit in the third quarter saying cost savings from the 2008 merger of St. Louis-based Anheuser-Busch and InBev ran ahead of plan. But revenue fell 10 percent as the recession led to people drinking less beer.

Based in Leuven, Belgium, AB InBev sold 3.1 percent less beer in the three months ended Sept. 30. Revenue for the quarter was $9.76 billion, down from combined revenue from Anheuser and InBev of $10.89 billion before last November's takeover.

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