Machinists Union Approves New Bombardier Contract

The Associated Press

WICHITA, Kan. (AP) — Members of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers approved a five-year contract with Bombardier Learjet on Saturday, putting an end to the month-long walkout.

The workers could return to the Wichita plant as soon as Monday.

Bombardier spokeswoman Peggy Gross said the new deal received about 70 percent support from the union members who voted Saturday. The union, which represents about 825 workers, had recommended Friday that members support the contract.

"We are satisfied with the outcome of the vote and are confident in moving forward and continuing to work with all of our employees," said Ralph Acs, vice president and general manager of Bombardier Learjet. "The agreement reflects our mutual commitment to the long-term success of our site."

The agreement was reached Thursday with the help of federal mediators.

"The strike is over, we've taken down the picket lines and people will be returning to work Monday," union spokesman Bob Wood said. "It certainly was an improvement and people felt like it was time to accept that and go back to work."

Machinists walked off the job Oct. 8 after rejecting a five-year contract offer over the length of the proposal and an increase in health insurance costs. The new contract is similar to the earlier offer in that there is no wage increase the first year and a 1 percent wage bump the next four years. But the contract approved Saturday includes a larger signing bonus of $2,500.

Health care was the primary issue that caused the strike, and was the focus of the mediation, the union said. The employee's share of the health insurance premium was reduced from 30 percent to 20 percent, with an extra 5 percent savings for those who participate in the wellness program — reducing their share to 15 percent.

Union officials estimate the health care improvements mean an employee with single coverage will see a $700 annual reduction in health insurance deductions. Employees with family coverage will see a $2,300 annual savings compared to the company's pre-strike offer, the union said.

In 2006, machinists were on strike for three weeks in the first work stoppage in the plant's history.

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