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USW workers ratify contract with Western Forest Products

Courier-Islander; with files from Postmedia News August 25, 2010

There should be peace in the woods of Coastal B.C. for the next four years after the United Steelworkers Local 1-1937 voted to ratify its contract with Western Forest Products.

The union announced Monday that a four-year collective agreement with Western Forest Products Inc. had been ratified by the membership.

The union said 82.4 per cent voted to accept the proposal after the two sides came to a tentative agreement in late July.

"The collective agreement gives the company and the union a four-year period of industrial peace," Darrel Wong, President of USW Local 1-1937, and member of the union's negotiating committee, said in a release.

"There are signs that the coastal forest industry is emerging from a prolonged crisis, and hopefully in four year's time, our membership will be able to benefit from a healthy forest industry."

While the deal does not include major wage gains, it also makes no concessions.

Wong also pointed out there were improvements in contract language. Included in the deal, which expires in June 2014, is a signing bonus and improvements in job security, health and welfare benefits, a long-term disability plan and severance pay. There are also general wage increases in the third and fourth year.

"Our membership did not expect to make major wage gains in this round of bargaining, but they were adamantly opposed to concessions, and expected improvements in contract language," said Brian Butler, First Vice-President of USW Local 1-1937. "We were able to accomplish both of these objectives."

The agreement covers the vast majority of Western's unionized hourly workforce belonging to USW Locals 1-1937 and 1-85. It covers about 2,400 sawmill and woodlands employees on Vancouver Island, the Mainland Coast and Haida Gwaii. USW Local 1-1937 was formed in 2009 through the merger of Locals 1-2171, 1-80 and 1-363.

"This is great news for our employees, customers, investors and communities," said Western CEO Steve Frasher. "This is an important next step in our continuing efforts to recover from the worst market conditions the industry has experienced in a generation."

Frasher said the company and union have worked as "strong partners" over the last difficult few years to improve margins, manage production and inventory, and find new markets.

"Our last two profitable quarters reflect this successful joint effort," he said.

The last contract between the union and company, reached after a bitter and divisive 13-week strike in 2007, expired June 15.

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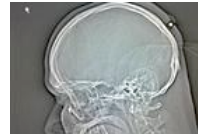
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