

## SWEET DRINK TURNS SOUR AS COCA COLA EMPLOYEES PICKET



Around 350 employees of the Coca-Cola Company at its East Hartford's plant have decided to abstain from work Thursday.

Members of the Teamsters Local 1035 walked off the job at 4 p.m. on May 16 and began picketing outside the plant at 471 Main St. The workers contract expired in December last year and since then, 6 months of negotiations have failed to produce an agreement. Workers say that they plan to continue picketing, until an agreeable solution is found. "We want our insurance that we have. We've worked hard for our insurance," said Matt Gegliardi. He said that the company was opting for a new distribution system, where people like him could become redundant. "They want companies to come pick up their soda like Wal Mart, then they'll deliver it and that's what I do," he added. He feared being laid off. Another worker, Chris Roos said that all of them, the drivers, mechanics, plant workers and delivery workers want better wages and better benefits. "What we asked for is a guarantee that no one would get laid off going forward and they said no." Roger Dupre, a worker at the plant said, "None of us really wanted to do this. This was a last-minute decision." Dupre has been working at the Coca-Cola's East Hartford plant for well nigh twenty years and was among those who volunteered to be one of the picketers to stand their ground overnight. "The company has to do what they have to do to try to make their ends meet, and unfortunately we're the ones that are having to tow the load, and as it turns out we feel as though we're doing a lot more than we're getting compensated for," he said. Dupre clarified that the reason why things came to such a pass, was that the negotiations came unstuck, when the health benefits were being discussed. He said, that they had allowed the company to use, \$2.65 towards their health plan rather than using the amount to raise their wages. He said that the company wants not only that money, but much more. A Coca-Cola representative countered Dupre's arguments by saying, "We entered negotiations in good faith, seeking a common-sense agreement that was fair and equitable. Despite months of negotiations and numerous proposed agreements by Coca-Cola, union leaders choose to commence a work stoppage. We are disappointed that the work stoppage has occurred and look forward to resuming negotiations as soon as possible." Officials of the company say that production and distribution of the popular soft drink will remain unaffected by the strike. Workers believe that their refusal to deliver will mean that a coca cola shortage in Connecticut is eminent. Steve Pirelli, a spokesperson for Coca-Cola Southern New England, said workers at the New London plant are not under the same union as the striking workers and hence it will not have any effect in southeast Connecticut. The spokesman insinuated that the workers had wrongly timed their strike, given that they did so just as the summer season swings into play. He said that it would most likely drive the company to bring in independent drivers from outside the area, to ensure that its distribution is not hampered.

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