

Still striking at Maple Lodge

# Employee crying 'fowl'

By JIM WILSON

Special to the Independent/Free Press

Striking Maple Lodge Farms workers are being bullied and fed "misinformation" by their union, an employee who wants to return to work has charged.

And, as the strike by 1,000 workers at the Norval poultry processing plant rolled into its fourth day, concerns have been raised about suffering of chickens, shortages in stores and restaurants and the future of the company.

Meanwhile, Peel Regional Police are advising motorists to stay clear of Winston Churchill Blvd., between Embleton Rd. and Steeles Ave., where showdowns between angry pickets and company trucks and buses continue around the clock.

There have been no arrests.

Maple Lodge drivers, cutters, pluckers and processors—represented by the United Commercial and Food Workers Union, Local 175—walked off their jobs Monday afternoon, effectively shutting down operations at the largest chicken processing plant in the province.

But several unionized employees have continued to work through the strike and "a good number" of others would like to, one inside worker told this newspaper.

"No one knows what they're there for," said the woman, who asked that her name not be used. "(Strikers) don't understand the entire story."

Most of the workers are Portuguese and speak little English, she said, adding, the union

has not held any meetings or distributed any literature to workers since a strike vote was taken at the Brampton Holiday Inn, Oct. 25.

Employees, she said, are "scared" after being told they will be fined \$2,000 by the union if they cross picket lines.

Union spokesperson Patrick Hayes called this "supposition," although penalties for crossing—as little as \$10—are not uncommon and would be set after a settlement, he said.

Hayes said the reports of dissension are "totally false" and that morale remains "really good," despite inclement weather. The union confirmed that about 50 workers have crossed the picket line, most on the first day.

Strikers have been successful in preventing trucks from entering the plant and "if it wasn't for the support of all these workers, we wouldn't be able to pull this off."

Maple Lodge Farms workers were earning an average hourly rate of \$13 per hour prior to the strike—the highest wage in the industry and double the amount earned by their U.S. counterparts, the company said. Strike pay is \$90 a week.

They are seeking wage increases of 1 1/4 per cent, or 25 cents an hour, over a two-year deal. The company is demanding a two-year wage freeze.

In a statement released Tuesday, the company says its "major concern during negotiations has been to protect the jobs of its 1,500 present employees and not be faced with major layoffs because of precarious economic conditions in the industry."

Maple Lodge Farms Inc. slaughters nearly 250,000 chickens per day—about one quarter of Ontario's production. It warns that food stores and restaurants such as Swiss Chalet and Kentucky Fried Chicken will soon begin to run short. Only one competitor in Ontario, The Poultry Company, is large enough to assist in production and that its schedule is already full, the company said.

The privately-owned company says it has a backup of 100,000 chickens that have been denied entry into the plant, causing "needless and inhumane suffering."

Hayes called this a "moot point." He said Agriculture Canada have told the union that birds not processed within 48 hours are "no good anyway."



## Fatal winds

Thursday night's storm and high winds had a tragic outcome for the Mannell family of Trafalgar Road, south of Ballinafad, as Elizabeth (Betty) Mannell, 49, was killed when the chimney of the family's home collapsed on the roof, caving in on top of her and daughter Debbie, 18, leaving the two trapped in the basement covered with rubble. The accident happened after 9 p.m. Mannell was pronounced dead at the scene, while Debbie was taken to hospital, treated and released.

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