

Texarkana Cooper Tire local to vote on settlement while Findlay workers remain locked out

James Brewer
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United Steelworkers (USW) Local 752L issued a joint statement with Cooper Tire & Rubber announcing a tentative contract agreement shortly after midnight Thursday when the contract for 1,500 workers at the Texarkana, Arkansas plant expired. No details were released.

The existing contract was extended until the holding of a ratification vote. Both the union and the company withheld information on the proposed deal until after the vote, which, according to the Local 752L web site, will be held Thursday, January 26.

With this action, the USW leadership has deliberately isolated 1,050 locked-out workers at the Cooper Tire home plant in Findlay, Ohio. They are in the ninth week of a lockout imposed by the company when the workers rejected sweeping new concessions demands, including changes that would slash wages. The USW, however, has rejected any action to halt the company's use of strikebreakers or mobilize the broad support that exists in the working class for the locked out workers.

The union's treachery has encouraged the company and politicians to step up their attacks on the workers. Security guards are maintaining round-the-clock video surveillance of picketers and two workers have been framed up on misdemeanor charges of "menacing" a strikebreaker. City officials have also torn down signs supporting the locked out workers, claiming they violate an ordinance.

The Texarkana workers had voted overwhelmingly for strike action, but the USW is dead set against broadening the struggle at Findlay to other plants. Any deal reached in Arkansas on the basis of back-stabbing the Findlay workers can only represent a capitulation to the company's demands.

Late in 2008, when contracts were due to be negotiated for several Cooper plants, the company threatened to close plants and demanded concessions. The Texarkana plant contract was reopened to force through concessions and the workers at Findlay, under pressure from the union, voted for a concessions contract in the hope of saving their jobs. Cooper closed down its Georgia factory at a cost of 1,300 jobs.

When negotiations began for the new contracts, the company escalated its concessions demands, even though it has reaped large profits in recent years and increased the seven-figure compensation packages for its top executives.

The news media in Arkansas is presenting the upcoming vote as a referendum to preserve the jobs of the Texarkana Cooper workers, reporting that the 1,500 workers "still have their jobs—at least for now."

Denny Cole, a locked-out worker in Findlay, expressed his initial feelings about the announcement. He told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "I don't know what to think to be honest. It looks like they have their thing and we have ours. The American worker needs help all over. That's my opinion."



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