

Amidst widespread discontent, Cooper Tire workers vote for concessions contract

Our reporter
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Workers at Cooper Tire in Findlay, Ohio voted for a concessions contract pushed by the United Steel Workers on Monday. While there was overwhelming opposition to the terms of the deal, which accept virtually all the demands of the company, workers expressed a lack of confidence in the USW union, which insisted that the deal was “the best we can get.”

“It’s probably going to pass—but not with my vote,” one younger worker told the WWSW as he headed into the union hall. “The union is nothing but a business.” Another younger worker, Rob, added, “The company got 90 percent of what it wanted.”

The official tally according to the USW was 627 to 321.

The contract will lead to a sharp pay cut for many workers, with vastly increased powers to corporate management to re-rate jobs and drive out older, higher paid workers. The aim is to bring in young workers making poverty-level wages of \$13 an hour. (See, “Union pushes concessions contract at Cooper Tire”)

The USW has also paved the way for the victimization of at least 10 workers for picket line “violations,” subjecting them to disciplinary action including possibly losing their jobs.

Throughout the three-month-long lockout, workers at Findlay were isolated by the USW, which pushed through a concessions contract at the other main Cooper Tire plant in Texarkana, Arkansas. The workers were strung out on meager strike pay.

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party and its presidential candidate Jerry White distributed copies of a statement to workers going in to vote on Monday afternoon. Comments from workers give a sense of the general sentiment.

Joe, with 23 years at Cooper said, “This isn’t very different from the first proposal we rejected. But it’s

been three months of unemployment for us.

“Companies are locking out workers everywhere, from American Crystal to Caterpillar in Canada. The old politics is over—it’s all dominated by corporations that run everything.”

Mark, a worker with 20 years, said, “This contract stinks. The whole system doesn’t work unless you are rich and then the system works for you.

“All these corporations are pulling off power plays. If you don’t do exactly what they want, they say, ‘We’re going to shut your plant down.’ Cooper threatened to close whichever plant didn’t give it the concessions it wanted.

“You have new hires in the plant collecting food stamps. You can’t make ends meet on \$11 an hour.

“I’ve already been a victim of a plant closing. Textron used to make airfoils—turbine blades for jet engines. When they told us they would close the plant unless we gave up more, I said, ‘Been there, done that.’ If you want to close the plant go ahead. We have to have enough to live.”

Another worker, 56 years old, said, “You want to know how angry workers are? A lot of us are completely angry. We feel we do not have anyone to represent us. I have worked here for 38 years. How many years do I have left?

“I have two kids that were in college. Both of them had to drop out because of the strike. They are both working minimum wage jobs. What are me and my kids going to do?

“And what are the younger workers going to do? Who can live on \$11 an hour? This is not what we went on strike for.

“I believe we are on the verge of either a revolution or an evolution. It is going to be up to the people to decide what is going to happen.”

Adam, with five years at the plant, said, “I voted ‘no’ on the contract. I felt that if we give in now we are just going to go downhill.

“I am hoping it will be voted down. It looks like there is a 50-50 chance that it will pass.

“My feeling is they are asking too much. In many ways we are screwed either way with this contract. If it is accepted, we are cut badly, and if it doesn’t pass it will not get any better.

“I am one of the workers who was screwed on the COLA (cost of living allowance). I have been here for less than five years. My fifth year will be in May. But you have to have five years in in order to get COLA. They won’t give it to us even though it was promised to us when we hired in.”

Jerry Click, with less than five years, said, “I am also in that grey area and was promised COLA. A whole number of us were promised it but were denied it.

“I am opposed to the contract. I have seen this before. I worked at Phillips for two and a half years, and they shut the plant and sent the jobs to Mexico.

“At the time I made \$18-\$21 an hour. They moved to Mexico where they paid the workers \$4-\$5 a day. This is the direction Cooper tire is moving.

“It’s getting to be like this everywhere. With this contract my wage will stay the same but the cost of everything is going up.”



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