

Socialism and the Cooper Tire struggle

Statement of Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for US president

Jerry White
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Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate Jerry White issued the following statement to Cooper Tire workers in Findlay, Ohio. The workers are voting on a tentative agreement today after being locked out for three months. (See “Union pushes concessions contract at Cooper Tire”) For more information on the SEP campaign, visit socialequality.com.

As the candidate of the Socialist Equality Party in the 2012 US presidential election, I want to express my deepest solidarity with locked-out Cooper Tire workers. In the face of great hardship, you have carried out a courageous struggle that has earned you the admiration of workers throughout the US and the world.

The SEP calls on workers to oppose the contract being offered by the union and the company. However, a successful fight against the demand that you accept a drastic reduction in your living standards depends on forging a new strategy and waging a different type of struggle.

The experience of the last three months contains many important lessons for workers at Cooper Tire and for the entire working class.

Everywhere workers are being told to accept impossible wage cuts even as the companies shower millions on top executives and Wall Street investors. In November, Cooper Tire workers said “enough is enough.” The company responded by locking the gates, hiring replacement workers and threatening to close the plant.

As Saturday’s union meeting showed, the United Steelworkers and the AFL-CIO are unable and unwilling to defend workers against these attacks. USW International and Local 207L officials told workers that a contract containing virtually all of

management’s demands is “the best we can get.”

The USW abandoned at least 10 workers framed up for picket line “violations,” giving the company a green light to fire these militant workers and destroy their lives.

The company has also retained its power to re-rate jobs, drive out older, higher paid workers through speedup and harassment, and replace them with workers earning a poverty wage of \$13 an hour.

Whatever promises the company and the union make are not worth the paper they are written on. How long will it be before Cooper announces that its sales and profits are falling short, and that they must reopen the contract and take more out of the pockets of workers?

According to the USW, the only alternative is either accepting a slave’s charter or remaining locked out for months, if not years, before the company shuts the doors and moves elsewhere.

Whatever the outcome of today’s vote, the overwhelming sentiment among workers is that they cannot live with this contract. If the deal is ratified, it is only because workers know the USW will not carry out the necessary struggle to defeat the company’s blackmail demands.

The USW and other unions tell workers that nothing can be done except to beg the Cooper executives, the NLRB and the Obama administration to treat workers fairly. What a hopeless and self-defeating strategy!

Workers have also come to the understanding that local struggles are not enough to beat back multinational corporations that can shift production anywhere in the world. These corporations, moreover, have the full backing of the big business politicians, the

courts and the news media.

What then is the answer?

Workers have done everything they could within the framework the unions offered. They must break out of this framework. This means taking up a political struggle to get rid of the entire economic system that oppresses the working class.

For millions of workers and young people, politics is synonymous with lying and deception. And for good reason. The political system is dominated by money. The promises of the politicians are worth no more than those of corporations like Cooper Tire. The Democrats and Republicans spout lies precisely because they claim to speak for the people, when in fact they represent only the rich.

Obama and the Democratic Party are not a “people’s party,” but a party of Wall Street and the corporate bosses no less than their Republican counterparts. No struggle can be successful if workers are tied hand and foot to politicians that are bought and paid for by the same corporations that oppress us.

What we need is a politics of the working class. This means the struggle to unify all workers, in the United States and internationally, in a common fight and on the basis of a common program—a program that is aimed directly at the stranglehold of a tiny elite over all of economic and political life.

This is why the Socialist Equality Party has decided to intervene in the 2012 elections, to fight for this program. We say that the interests of the working class are not compatible with the capitalist system, and that a struggle is necessary for a new form of social organization, socialism.

Capitalism is based on the private ownership of the banks and the factories. It is dedicated to the enrichment of a wealthy elite through the extraction of profit from the labor of the working class.

This system has failed. It has failed workers in the United States, and it has failed the working class around the world. In every country, the financial masters of the universe insist that workers accept starvation wages and the destruction of health care, education and retirement benefits to pay for the economic crisis that the banks created. At the same time, the struggle for the control of profits and raw materials by the capitalist powers is threatening mankind with a new and devastating world war.

The bankruptcy of the unions is ultimately a product of the fact that they accept the capitalist system unconditionally. In the name of making US companies “more competitive,” the unions have enforced the wage-cutting demands of corporate America and helped the companies pit workers in the US against our brothers and sisters in other countries in a race to the bottom. Now global corporations like Caterpillar and General Motors are using the cheap labor they have attained in the US to demand brutal wage cuts from workers in Europe and other regions.

The first plank of the Socialist Equality Party’s program in the 2012 elections is for the international unity of the working class. Workers in every country have the same interests and confront the same enemy—globally organized corporations that scour the globe for cheap labor and profits.

We insist that there are non-negotiable social rights: the right to a decent-paying and secure job, the right to health care, housing and education for our families, the right to a comfortable retirement.

To achieve these rights, workers must replace the capitalist system with socialism, that is a system of genuine equality and democratic control of basic industry and the banks by the working people ourselves. So long as we accept the existing social system, we have no choice but to accept our own exploitation.

We urge workers at Cooper Tire to consider these issues. If you agree, become involved in the SEP campaign.



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