

# Graphic Packaging International workers in Domino, Texas reject second contract, issue strike notice

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On Monday, in Domino, Texas, 400 Graphic Packaging International (GPI) workers in United Steelworkers (USW) locals 1148 and 1149 voted to reject a second contract negotiated between USW and the packaging manufacturer and issued a 10-day notice to strike. The first contract was voted down in December 2022. Workers have been without a contract since April 2022.

An unnamed union representative speaking to the *Texarkana Gazette* acknowledged the vote represented “overwhelmingly” a repudiation of the latest contract. The representative told the newspaper that the dispute was about “quality of life issues,” acknowledging that workers had expressed opposition to low pay, inadequate health care benefits, and the two-tier pay system enforced at the packaging facility.

Broadly despised among workers, the two-tier system is a cost-cutting scheme employed by corporations which creates two payroll and benefit structures for workers. In practice the tiered system functions to maintain existing wages and benefits for senior workers, while new workers are hired at a lower wage and benefit structure. Under this system younger workers are often paid less than older workers for performing the same work.

Illustrating the deplorable conditions faced by workers at the Domino mill, one USW worker in September posted anonymously to Reddit: “We have been in negotiations since April with no movement on wages and only Graphic demanding job cuts. The company has been offering nothing in return while making record profits each quarter. They have proposed changes to our contract like allowing over 16 hours work and want to implement the right to schedule

employees unlimited days of work consecutively in addition to having the right to make employees work while on vacation time.”

Other workers responded to the post by suggesting that workers at the Domino mill broaden their appeals to workers in other adjacent industries.

Another apparent USW worker at the Domino facility commented: “[E]veryone is ready to shut that mill down and walk out, they only have 5-6 big mills so one goes down and their stock prices are going to drop like a rock when investors find out.”

In sharp contrast to the deplorable working conditions at the packaging facility, GPI has raked in massive profits in recent years, and is the eighth largest packaging production facility in the United States.

A multi-billion-dollar Fortune 500 company headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, GPI employs over 25,000 workers at 130 facilities worldwide. According to financial analysis organization Macrotrends, GPI amassed \$1.83 billion in gross profits for the year 2022, and its net worth as of February 14, 2023 was \$7.24 billion.

In 2018, GPI cemented a \$6.5 billion merger and acquisition of paper manufacturing giant International Paper (IP), the largest paper manufacturer in the United States, with a revenue of \$19.3 billion in 2021. The acquisition was finalized in May 2021. The procurement saw GPI’s fortunes skyrocket, with annual revenues rising nearly 32 percent, to \$9.44 billion, in 2022.

In June 1987, International Paper’s Androscroggin plant in Jay, Maine, was the flash point of a strike wave that spread to several facilities operated by IP in the US, ending in 1988. The International Paper workers

were represented by United Paperworkers' International Union (UPIU), under the AFL-CIO. UPIU later became part of USW.

One thousand twelve hundred and fifty workers walked out on strike when IP's executives demanded wage cuts and increasing monthly payments for health benefits. The paper manufacturer additionally called for an end to double-time pay, and forced work on holidays. After the walkout, the company fired every worker who struck and hired scabs, who became permanent replacements.

The struggle by GPI workers is just the latest iteration of growing class struggles across the United States and internationally that has seen mass strikes and protests by millions of workers across Europe and South Asia.

While corporations post record profits, workers have experienced unprecedented attacks on their living standards. The persistence of high inflation amid the pandemic has forced workers to scramble to pay higher prices for housing, food and gasoline.

Meanwhile, workers can have no confidence in the USW as a vehicle for advancing their interests. The USW has a well-documented record of betraying workers' struggles, isolating strikes and ramming through sellout contracts.

Recently, USW mill workers at WestRock's Mahrt paper mill in Cottonton, Alabama, without a contract since November 2021, ended a five-month-long lockout. The mill workers had rejected three contracts previously when the union forced through a fourth contract and shut down the strike, imposing contract language virtually unchanged from the prior three company offers.

In February 2022, the USW isolated a 10 month lockout of workers by oil workers at ExxonMobil's Beaumont, Texas, refinery and rammed through a sellout contract with the assistance of the Biden administration.

The USW also isolated and betrayed over 100 paper mill workers at the Woodland Pulp mill in Baileyville, Maine, when workers in early December voted by a 92 percent margin to strike later in the month, demanding higher wages and cost-of-living adjustments as a hedge against high inflation.

One day after workers voted to reject a contract for the third time, the Maine AFL-CIO claimed that workers "overwhelmingly" voted affirmatively for a

fourth contract, which fell far short of workers' demands.

To prevent the inevitable sellout of their demands by the union, it is necessary for GPI workers to form rank-and-file committees to defend and advance their interests and to link up those committees with workers across industries. We invite all workers at GPI to contact the *World Socialist Web Site* to publicize their demands and their struggle, to link up with other workers, and for assistance in forming rank-and-file committees.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**