



**Feb 08, 2012**

## **Cooper Tire talks stall**

By LOU WILIN

STAFF WRITER

Contract talks between Cooper Tire and its unionized Findlay workers have stalled short of the deal reached with Texarkana workers, Local 207L President Rod Nelson said Tuesday.

Cooper Tire leaders did not respond to requests for comment.

"We met with the company the last few days in informal discussions to see if we could be fruitful and progress toward a contract, but (the discussions were) not fruitful enough," Nelson said.

Nelson called the company's latest proposal to the locked-out Findlay workers "a lot less" than what it gave to its Texarkana workers. He declined to disclose details.

"Today they broke our heart," Nelson said. "They want a piece of our a--. That's exactly what they want. We still seem to be far apart."

More than 1,000 unionized Findlay workers were locked out by the company on Nov. 28 after rejecting a company contract proposal. During the lockout, Cooper successfully negotiated a new contract with 1,500 unionized workers at its plant in Texarkana, Ark.

No talks are scheduled in Findlay for the rest of this week. Nelson said union leaders will meet with members Saturday to apprise them of the situation.

Cooper leaders appear to be showing an appetite for aggression, said Will Hannum III, managing partner for Schwartz Hannum of Andover, Mass., which represents companies in labor negotiations.

"They're playing hardball," Hannum said.

They also are part of a trend.

"I'm noticing more news coverage suggesting companies are pursuing lockouts more aggressively," he said. "It's a much more aggressive approach than might have been seen a few years ago."

More typically, the labor agreement in Texarkana would have seemed like a blueprint for Findlay, Hannum said.

On Tuesday, it was not.

"They're claiming Texarkana was better to work with than us," Nelson said.

Perhaps the Findlay and Texarkana situations differ in the personalities and relationships between management and labor.

"Personalities can be an enormous factor," Hannum said. "Nobody wants to lose, or lose face, or give in to the SOB on the other side," he said. "A personal bond can be helpful in getting through tough issues. If it's not there, it can be that much tougher getting through them."

Or perhaps labor or other costs are lower in Texarkana than in Findlay, said Harry Katz, dean of Cornell University's Industrial and Labor Relations School.

"I wouldn't be surprised if the Texarkana plant in the south might have a lower wage scale," Katz said.

Texarkana also may have more modern equipment or closer access to a shipping lane, he said.

But Cooper is taking risks in persisting in the Findlay worker lockout -- now 10 weeks old -- and using temporary workers, he said. It increases the chance for a costly product recall.

"Management should be thinking about whether there's any safety problem in using a temporary workforce," Katz said.

The unionized Findlay workers want to return to work.

"We're still available to work," Nelson said. "There's no reason they shouldn't let us back to work and still negotiate."

He questioned the rationale for continuing the lockout. Cooper Tire leaders initially justified the lockout as a means to protect the company from simultaneous work stoppages at two plants. Now that Cooper has a four-year labor agreement with Texarkana workers, that threat is gone.

But Nelson doubted that will sway the company to end the lockout.

"I guess we're going to experience more of this nightmare," he said.

Probably, since Cooper leaders have sound economic reasons for continuing the lockout.

If the company ended the lockout and sent its temporary workers away, the union could threaten a strike and disrupt operations, Hannum said. Cooper also may have contractual or other economic reasons for not wanting to change workforces, he said.

But there's another motive.

"The lockout gives them some leverage," Hannum said.

Katz agreed.

The company is trying to drive down the union's negotiating demands by saying to union workers, "We're not suffering from this," Katz said. "It makes me think of Clint Eastwood and the Dirty Harry line, 'Go ahead, make my day.'"

"They are weakening (the union workers') demands. Management is calculating they have the upper hand," Katz said. "They're saying to the Findlay workforce, 'You don't have as much power as you think.'"

Wilin: 419-427-8413 [Send an e-mail to Lou Wilin](#)

---

[All contents © 1996 - 2012](#)

The Findlay Publishing Company

P.O. Box 609

Findlay, OH 45839-0609

Phone: (419) 422-5151

[www.findlaypublishing.com](http://www.findlaypublishing.com)

Please read our privacy guidelines at

<http://www.thecourier.com/templates/about/privacy.asp>