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Cooper talks: no progress

By LOU WILIN

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Even with help from a federal mediator, negotiations Monday between Cooper Tire & Rubber and locked-out union workers went nowhere.

"As of now, we haven't got anything resolved," United Steelworkers Local 207L President Rod Nelson said.

There were no plans to resume talks today.

"This is a tough blow. The union's available to meet with the company to discuss further, but nothing is planned," he said.

Management and labor did not meet in the same room on Monday, according to Nelson. The mediator relayed messages back and forth.

"If things are really bad, they don't even get in the same room," said William E. Hannum III, managing partner for Schwartz Hannum of Andover, Mass., which represents companies in labor negotiations.

Cooper media relations officials did not respond Monday to an inquiry for this story.

A union hangup is the company wants to re-evaluate pay levels for all unionized jobs.

"Without a guarantee of what we're going to make, it's like giving them a blank check," Nelson said. "We can't hand them a blank check to use against us later."

Nelson sounded gloomy Monday.

"I'm hoping the company will come to the table eventually with the intent of negotiating a contract. As of now, they're not serious," he said. "They're trying to bully us into taking this gosh darn contract."

Union members voted 606-305 on Nov. 27 to reject a proposed new labor contract. The next day, Cooper locked out the 1,050 unionized employees.

The union's previous three-year contract expired Oct. 31.

A mediator is no guarantee of a deal, Hannum said Monday. Sometimes parties are too far apart in substance or personalities. Sometimes parties cannot get beyond their anger,

he said.

But Hannum warned not to read too much into another day of deadlock.

"It could change tomorrow," he said. "Somebody has to blink."

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