

Teresa Brown and Becki Jacobson live nearly 1,000 miles apart, but they share a bond forged by adversity. Both are taking a stand against employers who have locked them out of their jobs.

Brown has worked at Cooper Tire in Findlay, Ohio, for 12 years. Her husband, father and uncle also work at the plant.

Jacobson is a third generation employee of American Crystal Sugar in Moorhead, Minn., where she has worked for nearly 30 years.



Jacobson has become a spokesperson for her union. In November she addressed Minneapolis Letter Carriers about the lockout.

On Aug. 1, Jacobson and 1,300 other Crystal Sugar workers found the doors locked when they reported for their shifts at seven plants in Minnesota, North Dakota and Iowa. On Nov. 28, Brown and more than 1,000 Cooper Tire workers were barred from their jobs.

In both cases, the companies took retribution against employees because they refused to take major concessions in their union contracts. In both cases, the companies were doing very well financially – thanks in large part to their skilled and dedicated workforces.

“We have helped the company [Crystal Sugar] make record profits for the last five years,” noted Jacobson.

Cooper Tire workers gave up \$30 million in concessions three years ago to help the company, said Brown. “In those three years, they were the most profitable they had ever been” and even opened plants in China and Serbia.

Yet these successful companies have turned their backs on employees and locked them out. Union leaders say they can’t remember a year when employers used the lockout so frequently. Workers who are locked out are still employees of the firm, but don’t draw a paycheck or benefits.

The Crystal Sugar workers in Minnesota and the Cooper Tire workers in Ohio qualify for state unemployment benefits, but the Crystal Sugar workers in North Dakota aren’t eligible under that state’s law and depend entirely on contributions to the union’s hardship fund.