

US aircraft machinists strike Boeing

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In their second strike in as many contract negotiations, Boeing machinists struck the airplane manufacturing giant at 12:01 Saturday morning.

The three-year contract between the International Association of Machinists (IAM) and Aerospace Workers and Chicago-based Boeing Company expired last Wednesday and, despite a 48-hour last-minute negotiation extension requested by federal mediators and the governor of the state of Washington, the sides were unable to reach an agreement.

Over 27,000 members struck Boeing facilities in Washington, Oregon and Kansas. This is the first back-to-back strike in Boeing history. As of this writing no additional talks are scheduled.

Workers rejected Boeing's "best and final offer" with 80 percent voting against the contract. The union then called for a second vote on whether to walk out, which passed with 87 percent voting in favor to strike. Union members rejected Boeing's offer of an 11 percent wage increase over three years (well below the rate of inflation) and a slightly improved pension, pointing out that increased health insurance co-pays and deductibles would wipe out any wage gain.

In a last-ditch effort to avert a strike IAM negotiator Mark Blondin and Seattle IAM District President Tom Wroblewski flew with Boeing's chief negotiator to Florida—where the IAM Grand Lodge convention was due to begin on Sunday—to meet with IAM International President Tom Buffenbarger. No substantive moves were made and the effort came to nothing.

In 2005 a 28-day strike delayed delivery of 28 planes and cost Boeing \$300 million.

A major issue in the strike is the previous concessions-laden contracts negotiated by the IAM. Randy, a worker at the Gresham, Oregon Boeing plant, told the WSW, "If they want to give back the benefits that I got when I came here in 1977 I would give back what

they offer and chip in \$1.00 per hour."

"We're out here for a lot of reasons," including built-up resentment over previous contracts and workers' hopes for job security and higher pensions and starting wages, Don Grinde, 51, told Bloomberg.com as he picketed outside Boeing's Everett, Washington, wide-body factory, where he's a crane operator. "The first step for us is to hit the 'delete button' for all the takeaways, and then we can start from there" with a new contract, he said.

Another issue concerns a concession made in the aftermath of 9/11 in the 2002 contract that allowed Boeing to outsource development of roughly three-quarters of Boeing's latest airplane, the Dreamliner, to suppliers. Currently, Boeing has 677 of these planes ordered valued at almost \$110 billion. The Dreamliner, designated as the 787, is under construction in three countries—Italy, Japan and the US—by six companies, outside of Boeing. One, New Breed Logistics, Inc., in North Carolina is a nonunion plant.

That the IAM made job security the first point on its strike call indicates union leaders' fears that Boeing will increasingly move production out of IAM unionized plants and undermine their source of dues. The *Seattle-Times* of September 2 quotes Wall Street analyst Joe Campbell, "A longer strike will have more material consequences, particularly for the 787. And it will make Boeing continue to think about alternatives to the Seattle work force." According to the same issue of the *Times*, "In the past, the company has refused to allow unions to restrict its ability to outsource."

Boeing is the world's second largest airplane manufacturer after Europe's Airbus.

Many workers were incensed by the union's decision to postpone the strike two additional days in order to continue negotiations. Workers who were chafing to set up picket lines shouted abuse and accusations of "sellout" at Blondin and Seattle President Wroblewski

at the South Seattle union meeting. In the next two days, according to workers in the plant, as many as 30 percent of machinists stayed home while those who showed up for work continued their weeks-long campaign of noise-making on the hour and marching down the aisles during breaks.

The WSWS spoke to Boeing workers in Gresham, Oregon. Julia, who has worked for Boeing for less than a year, said, “We have to fight for the future people, just as previous Boeing workers fought for us.” In her job in the maintenance facility Julia said she starts at \$8.47 per hour.

Randy added, “They have not brought up the starting wage in 16 years. All the other companies base their wage on this.” In reference to the upcoming US presidential election, he said, “They wouldn’t be in that place running for president if the corporations weren’t behind them.”



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