

Machinists union imposes deep concessions at St. Louis Boeing plant

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The International Association of Machinists pushed through massive concessions at Boeing military aircraft facilities in the St. Louis, Missouri area in a vote held Sunday. The deal, which was patterned on the givebacks imposed on Boeing commercial aircraft workers in the Pacific Northwest last month, passed 1,269 to 449, with nearly 30 percent of the 2,400 workers abstaining from the vote.

The seven-and-a-half-year contract extension, unanimously endorsed by the union's 12-man bargaining committee, includes a host of cuts, including the elimination of defined benefit pensions and their replacement by a 401(k)-like program. The contract also establishes a two-tier wage system, with wages topping out at a reduction of between 8 and 49 percent of standard wages depending on job classification. Workers will also pay a larger portion of their health care costs.

The contract extension includes a buyout offer in which senior employees will be encouraged to retire so that they can be replaced with new hires earning the lower second-tier wage. In a naked attempt to buy votes the deal also includes an \$8,000 signing bonus.

The St. Louis facility builds F-15 and F/A-18 fighter jets as well as the EA-18G electronic attack aircraft. The contract extension also covers workers in China Lake, California and the Naval Air Station in Patuxent, Maryland.

Local IAM officials used the threat of layoffs to browbeat workers into voting for ratification. Speaking in the wake of the vote announcement IAM District 837 President Gordon King reiterated the union's threats declaring, "If (the vote) would have went the other way...we would have just went to the bargaining table in January 2015 with probably about 300 to 500 laid off and no winning of new work because we didn't get the

wage rates down comparable to what they needed to bid on future projects."

King also praised the two-tier wage structure claiming the new wages were not "too far off from traditional pay scales that are out there," claiming "they would put the company in a better position to bid for future work." He added, "You were going to be looking at layoffs, layoffs, layoffs and no potential for new work."

The vote followed the announcement by Boeing of record sales and profits for 2013.

The giant aircraft manufacturer reported a 6 percent year-over-year increase in revenue to \$86.6 billion. Net earnings rose 18 percent to \$4.6 billion.

Boeing and the IAM both said the cuts made the St. Louis facilities "more competitive" in the bid to attract more military contracts, including the Navy's unmanned U-Class drones and the Air Force T-X trainer jet program. The US military's F/A-18 Super Hornet program is scheduled to end in 2016 without additional orders.

Many St. Louis Boeing workers reacted angrily to the vote, reflected in posts on Facebook. Workers were particularly upset at the agreement of the IAM to slash pay for new hires. One worker wrote, "Intergeneration solidarity is going out the window with these deals."

Another added, "There will be nothing easy about turning this downward spiral around. It's always better to stop it right from the start. Back to the twenties and thirties we go. Bloodshed, beatings, arrests, killings and murder. All so people can make a decent living."

A third wrote, "It's a shame to learn about the arrangements this present IAM administration signs off on with our employers to enslave us. Why should we pay for this disservice?"

The vote by St Louis Boeing workers comes as

charges are piling up at National Labor Relations Board offices protesting the January 3 contract re-vote by Boeing workers in the Seattle area. So far, Boeing workers have lodged nearly 50 complaints alleging irregularities in the vote in which the concessions deal passed by 51 percent, according to union officials, after workers rejected virtually the same agreement by a 2-to-1 margin in November.

As in the case of St. Louis, IAM officials in the Pacific Northwest attempted to browbeat workers into voting “yes” with threats that the company would move production and destroy jobs. Boeing, the IAM and big business politicians subjected workers to a non-stop propaganda barrage. The union then scheduled the revote during the holidays to give workers as little time as possible to study the contract and to organize opposition.

The slashing of pensions for Boeing workers in Seattle set a precedent for further attacks on pensions across the US. In Washington state the Boeing vote was closely followed by the introduction of a bill in the state legislature that would offer an incentive to state employees who agree to move away from the state pension system into a 401(k)-type program and end pensions for new hires.

The vote in St. Louis, coming on the heels of the betrayal of Seattle-area Boeing workers, is a further indictment of the IAM and its apologists in the ranks of pseudo-left outfits like the International Socialist Organization. It demonstrates that the IAM is completely hostile to the interests of the workers that it falsely claims to represent.

As evidenced by the opposition in Seattle to the IAM sellout, an incipient rebellion is brewing in the working class against the repeated betrayals of the right-wing, pro-capitalist trade unions. For this movement to be successful it must be guided by a conscious program and new leadership.

At the root of the sellouts by the unions is their defense of the profit system and their nationalist orientation. The reaction by the unions to the threat by multi-national corporations like Boeing to shift production to low wage areas is to pressure workers to cut wages in order to be “competitive” in a never-ending race to the bottom.

The threat to jobs must be answered by the working class advancing a socialist program, for the

international unity of the working class and for the reorganization of production on the basis of meeting human needs, not corporate profits.

This requires the building of new, democratic, rank-and-file-based organizations of struggle completely independent of the IAM, management, and the big business politicians of the Democratic Party. We encourage Boeing workers interested in building such a movement to contact the Socialist Equality Party, read the *World Socialist Web Site* and make a decision to join and build our party.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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