

Boeing locks out private firefighters after contract talks break down

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Boeing locked out its private firefighter force on early Saturday after the latest round of contract negotiations failed over questions of wages. The lockout of members of the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF) began at 12:01 a.m. Saturday.

Affected were approximately 130 IAFF Local I-66 firefighters who protect Boeing's manufacturing facilities as well as perform preventive measures, respond to medical emergencies, and guard against refueling and flight incidents.

According to the union, Boeing firefighters are stationed at locations in Auburn, Everett, Renton, Seattle and Moses Lake, and receive around 200 emergency calls per month.

A facility in central Washington about 170 miles (275 kilometers) from Seattle was also locked out.

The company immediately brought in scabs to take over this important safety work. It said in a statement Saturday: "Despite extensive discussions through an impartial federal mediator, we did not reach an agreement with the union. We have now locked out members of the bargaining unit and fully implemented our contingency plan with highly qualified firefighters performing the work of (union) members."

Boeing maintains that its operations will not suffer, but the union says the lockout will negatively affect the surrounding communities as their local fire and emergency services will be the ones responding to emergency calls at Boeing.

The IAFF Local I-66 and Boeing have been negotiating for two and half months, with each side accusing the other of negotiating in bad faith. The union twice rejected company contract offers since February, and renewed negotiations broke down almost immediately on Monday according to the union.

The company employs its own private firefighter unit

as a method of saving on corporate insurance costs. The IAFF argues that these firefighters have saved Boeing billions of dollars in loss and insurance costs and are only asking for 40 to 50 percent in raises, which would still leave these private crews underpaid for the cities where the Boeing plants are located. Municipal firefighters in the same cities would still make 20 percent to 30 percent more than the Boeing firefighters even after the demanded raise.

Another major dispute is the time it takes to hit the top of the pay scale. Currently set at an incredible 14 years, the company is demanding that firefighters wait 19 years before reaching the top, while the IAFF is calling for only five years, to match the deal workers in other Boeing departments receive.

The company is playing hardball with critical safety workers in the very same plants where profit-driven negligence has produced massive defects in its planes.

Three hundred and forty-six people were killed in two accidents occurring in October 2018 and March 2019 involving a known software defect in the new Boeing 737 Max airplanes. In January 2024, a door plug on a 737 Max 9 operated by Alaska Airlines blew out just after takeoff.

By the end of 2019, the families of people who were killed in the two crashes had brought over 150 lawsuits against Boeing.

"This was supposed to be one of the most highly scrutinized planes in the world. And here you are with another incident that was risking passengers' lives," said Sydney Ember in a documentary from the *New York Times*.

The Arlington, Virginia based company has seen more than \$24 billion in losses since the beginning of 2019. The Department of Justice (DOJ) has also ruled that Boeing defrauded the Federal Aviation

Administration's (FAA) Aircraft Evaluation Group (AEG) and would pay a settlement of \$2.5 billion. Boeing has been under investigation due to quality assurance and safety concerns after a string of safety incidents occurred.

They are now apparently moving to impose the costs of management's negligence onto the backs of workers. Both the company and the corporate-controlled government are also looking to pin blame onto individual scapegoats within the company to shield the company's top executives from responsibility.

In October 2021, a federal grand jury indicted Mark Forkner, Boeing's former chief technical pilot for the 737 Max, on fraud charges but he was found "not guilty" on all charges. Forkner is so far the only individual to face criminal charges in the case of the two 737 Max crashes

The criminal investigation by the DOJ centered on two workers who, Boeing testified, "deceived the FAA AEG" about the Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System (MCAS), which according to the DOJ, "may have played a role" in both 737 Max crashes. The DOJ said this "deception" resulted in critical information about MCAS being omitted from a key FAA document as well as airplane manuals and training materials for pilots.

David P. Burns, the acting assistant attorney general of the DOJ's criminal division at the time, said: "Boeing's employees chose the path of profit over candor by concealing material information from the FAA concerning the operation of its 737 Max airplane and engaging in an effort to cover up their deception."

With passenger and shareholder lawsuits looming, Boeing announced to its workers on February 21, 2024 that Ed Clark, the leader of the 737 program since 2021, would be replaced.

While the courts and Boeing itself attribute these catastrophic failures to individuals within the company, it is nothing but an attempt to absolve the ruling class of the consequences of their murderous drive for profits and war.

The company is deeply enmeshed within the military-industrial complex that is indispensable to the ruling class' drive for war abroad. This ruling class will not allow Boeing to be held accountable, as that accountability would threaten their war efforts as well

as their own stock portfolios.

This relentless profit-driven operation backed by the ultra-rich and US imperialism raises alarming questions about the recent deaths of two Boeing whistleblowers. John Barnett was a former worker at Boeing who had a record of complaints about safety issues with the 787 Dreamliner. Barnett was found dead on March 9, 2024 from an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound on what was supposed to be his third day of testimony in court after Boeing counsel requested that he come in for an extra day.

Joshua Dean, a quality auditor at Boeing supplier Spirit AeroSystems, reported manufacturing defects on the 737 Max. He was fired in April 2023 and died on May 1, 2024 from a sudden infection.

Boeing's lockout of its firefighters is simply the latest move to impose relentless cost-cutting, endangering public safety, in its pursuit of profits. But the struggle of the firefighters is not only against this powerful greedy company, but also against the military-industrial complex and the state with which Boeing is integrated.



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