

5,000 Textron machinists walk out in Wichita, Kansas, while Boeing workers hold public meeting on strike

Bryan Dyne

22 September 2024

Are you a machinist at Textron Aviation? Contact the WSWS today for information about building a rank-and-file committee to impose the will of the membership.

Join the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee to fight against union sellouts! Text (406) 414-7648 or email boeingworkersrfc@gmail.com.

On Sunday, 5,000 machinists at Textron Aviation in Wichita, Kansas voted by 81 percent to strike after massively rejecting a contract endorsed by the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) District 70. The strike began at 12:01am on Monday.

The strike is the first at the company since machinists struck Hawker Beechcraft in 2008, which lasted 25 days. Since then, alongside stagnating wages, workers lost their pension when Beechcraft and Cessna Aircraft were merged by the conglomerate Textron to create Textron Aviation in 2014. In addition to higher wages and better healthcare, workers are determined to win back their lost pension, a key reason why many went into the industry in the first place.

Workers at Textron were undoubtedly inspired by their class brothers and sisters at Boeing, where 33,000 machinists are in the tenth day of a strike. Workers at Boeing also rebelled against a sellout contract presented to them by the IAM, which met none of the membership's demands. As at Textron, Boeing workers are fighting for restored pensions and an inflation-busting wage increase.

The strikes at both Boeing and Textron are part of a growing movement of workers fighting to assert their basic social rights and fight against growing social inequality and for decent living standards.

Similar to what was proposed to machinists at Boeing, the four-year offer from Textron, backed by union officials, includes a 26 percent pay increase over the four years, which does not keep pace with inflation. In the first year, it only pays at most \$27 an hour to new-hires in a city which saw home prices jump more than 21 percent in just the past year.

A striking worker at Boeing told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "It's an exact mirror of our contract. The only difference between them and us is they get a \$3,000 bonus every year." Moreover, the lump-sum bonus replaces the current percentage-based yearly bonus, rather than adding on to it.

The Boeing worker continued, "So they offer these guys exactly the same offer. And by the way, they rejected the contract the same way. So they're going on strike today at midnight."

The proposed contract also cuts Textron's contributions to employees enrolled in a Health Savings Account by half, negating any

increase workers might see from going to a lump-sum bonus. Workers were also outraged by the offer of only two weeks of parental leave. As one Textron worker wrote on social media, "That really is a slap in the face."

In addition to essentially mirroring the Boeing contract, the District 70 leadership also attempted to mirror the method used by District 751 officials to get the contract passed. While claiming in the days leading up to the strike that the union and the company were "far apart," District 70 President Lisa Whitley then asserted, when the contract was revealed, that it was "one of the best contracts in decades."

As at Boeing, the union bureaucracy also tried to use antidemocratic IAM bylaws under which the contract is automatically "ratified" if less than two-thirds of workers vote to strike. Workers came out in force, however, and easily met this threshold.

To carry forward this momentum requires that the rank and file at Textron maintain their own initiative, independent of the union apparatus. They should follow the example of their fellow workers at Boeing, which two weeks ago formed the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee (BWRFC) on the eve of their contract vote, calling for a rejection of the agreement and for workers to mobilize independently of the union apparatus.

The founding statement declared, in part, "That the IAM officials had the nerve to send this contract to us is a declaration that they, including District 751 President Jon Holden, don't speak for us but for Boeing."

And a second statement, released after the strike vote, made clear that

For us to win, the membership must really take control of the next phase of the struggle. We formed the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee because we recognize the enormous power of workers on the shop floor and understand the need for rank-and-file workers, not the IAM bureaucracy, to control this struggle. Only in this way can we fight for and win what we need, not what the company, government and union bureaucrats say is affordable.

Rank-and-File Committee holds public meeting

The committee also held a public meeting Sunday, Textron workers voted to strike. The opening report was given by WSWS writer Bryan Dyne, who noted that the strike at Boeing “began after a rebellion by the rank and file against a tentative contract brought to the membership by the IAM District 751 leadership, which met none of the workers demands.”

After reviewing other struggles of the working class, including that at Textron, Dyne warned about “the danger of government intervention.” He continued: “Boeing is a critical part of the US economy and a major defense contractor. The fact that a federal mediator is already working with Boeing and the IAM leadership to make another deal speaks to the high level of backroom discussions being held on this strike by the Biden-Harris administration. No section of the US ruling elite wanted this strike, both because it is eating into their profits and because it is impeding the war aims in Gaza, Russia, Iran, China and elsewhere.”

A Boeing worker and a member of the BWRFC then commented on the prioritization by management of profit over safety and quality. “Everything is always for the schedule and the rush to get planes out the door. ... It’s so fast people often don’t get proper training.”

He continued:

Safety should be our first priority. Safety, quality and nothing else. If you don’t have a safe airplane or a quality product, what’s the point of building it? You cannot park an airplane next to a cloud and say, “I’m going to fix it in the air.” There are 200 people inside that might die.

The worker also commented on the contract:

Most of us are pretty much running on bare bones. There’s nothing else to take. They took away pensions, now they are taking away our bonus. Now they want to increase medical. And what is offered? Absolutely nothing.

When you do the numbers correctly, you see the raise is not really there. It’s a lot of things taken away to just inflate the numbers. Back before the merger [in 1997 between Boeing and McDonnell Douglas] bonuses were an average of \$13,000 to \$14,000. Now they are about \$8,000, if you work a lot of overtime. It’s just not enough.

Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and socialist who ran for president of the United Auto Workers against Shawn Fain in 2022, spoke on the importance of rank-and-file committees:

We need our own organizations, composed of workers and controlled by workers. The unions basically allow companies to do whatever they wish. The contracts are not binding on them, and workers need to understand that if they are going to fight.

We need to develop an understanding that it’s not about binding agreements on us. It’s about the will of the membership. It’s about what the workers need, not whatever the company or the union says they can afford.

the Jerry White, the vice-presidential candidate of the Socialist Equality Party, was invited to speak by the committee. He noted the connection between the strike at Boeing and the growing danger of war, “The US government spends about \$1 trillion a year on war. Massive amounts of money go to Israel for the genocide in Gaza, to Ukraine for the proxy war against Russia and to prepare for war against China.”

Adding that Boeing is also a major defense contractor, he said:

Workers are engaged in a fight not just against a particularly ruthless employer, but a critical institution for American imperialist interests throughout the world.

And the same capitalist profit interests that are behind these wars—to grab up raw materials, to grab markets, to prevent the rise of new competitors—are the same interests that are waging a war against the working class in the United States.

The billionaires in the US have a collective wealth of \$5.2 trillion. The top ten percent of the population owns two-thirds of the total wealth in America, while the bottom half owns only 2.6 percent of the wealth.

That somehow the employers and the workers have the same interests is false. That’s what we refer to as a corporatist outlook, the denial that workers have interests that are independent of and antagonistic to their employers.

As the brother said, workers inside the factories are highly skilled and can run these industries more efficiently and produce things safely. But it requires the overthrow of private ownership of these giant industries by a financial parasitical class. It means the establishment of socialism, which means workers’ control over these industries.

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