

As talks resume at Pratt & Whitney in Connecticut, company cuts off workers' healthcare

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Official negotiations between the International Association of Machinists and aerospace company Pratt & Whitney resumed Thursday as the strike by 3,000 workers in East Hartford and Middletown, Connecticut continued into its third week. The strike, which began May 5, is the first walkout in over two decades.

Pratt & Whitney is a leading aerospace manufacturer and produces a wide range of advanced propulsion systems at the two Connecticut facilities. It supplies advanced aircraft systems to the US Air Force, including the F-22 Raptor and F-35 Joint Strike Fighter programs.

The strike takes place amid challenges in the aerospace supply chain and recent manufacturing defects in Pratt & Whitney's geared turbofan (GTF) engines discovered in 2023. Despite this setback, the company reported a \$580 million profit in the first quarter of 2025, a 41 percent increase over 2024.

The walkout began after workers voted by 77 percent to reject the company offer brought back by the IAM. Workers are demanding higher wages, better benefits, retirement plans and guarantees on job security. After the rejection, Pratt & Whitney withdrew from negotiations and two weeks into the strike cut workers off of medical benefits to try to force them back to work.

As of May 19, workers and their dependents lost healthcare coverage and other benefits provided by the company. Strikers have been instructed by their union to sign up for healthcare through the state healthcare marketplace, Access Health CT or stop gap COBRA insurance. Workers would be required to pay out of pocket for these plans.

During the two-month strike in 2024 by 33,000 workers at Boeing, who are also members of the IAM, the company also cut off healthcare benefits for strikers who did not return to work by September 30, 2024. The union did nothing to provide healthcare for strikers, who could only continue their healthcare through COBRA, at their own

expense.

The cutoff of medical coverage along with the IAM's poverty strike benefits of \$250 a week were used by Boeing and the IAM bureaucracy to end the powerful strike and push through a sellout deal that has paved the way for massive job cuts.

Striking workers must be on guard against a sellout as official talks resume and demand that trusted workers, elected by the rank and file, take part in all talks and report to the membership. The guiding slogans must be: No backroom deals! No end to the strike until workers have sufficient time to study, discuss and vote on a deal.

IAM Lodge 700 President Wayne McCarthy said the union will not back down until they receive job security and a fair contract. But behind the scenes, the IAM bureaucracy is working with the company and the Democratic Party to shut the strike down as soon as possible.

McCarthy hailed an announcement from Democrats, Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz and State Sen. Matt Lesser, Democrat from Middletown, that workers would be eligible to apply for healthcare coverage under Access Health CT, paying out of pocket. Democratic Attorney General William Tong issued a demagogic statement condemning the "huge conglomerate punishing and intimidating workers for exercising their legal rights."

McCarthy said, "When COVID was raging throughout the US, our members had to report to work as essential employees." But the union did nothing to fight the life-threatening exposure to Covid-19, even as rank-and-file workers in auto, meatpacking and other industries conducted wildcat strikes to shut down infected workplaces.

The Biden administration, which the IAM supported, continued the core elements of Trump's COVID-19 policy, especially the prioritization of reopening factories over public health measures. Both Democrats and Republicans have left the US population vulnerable to ongoing and future pandemics, placing capitalist interests over public health at

workplaces and schools.

The last strike at Pratt & Whitney in 2001 was settled after 10 days with a contract that gave just a 10 percent pay raise over the three years. Average hourly wages rose to only \$23.27 to \$25.88 by the end of the contract. According to job sites, including Indeed and ZipRecruiter, average hourly rates at Pratt & Whitney were as low as \$17 to \$20 in 2015, rising to only \$19 to \$23 in 2021. The sites list hourly wages for workers as \$19.10 to \$32.99 for 2024-2025, with \$25 to \$28.50 for new hires.

Pratt & Whitney's latest contract proposal reportedly included an 18.6 percent increase in total pay, bonuses and retirement benefits over three years, with a 4 percent immediate wage increase and a \$5,000 signing bonus. The company proposal falls far short of keeping up with inflation and meeting workers' needs on wages, benefits and job security. The last consideration is especially important as Pratt & Whitney and its owner, RTX (Raytheon), have already moved some operations to non-union facilities in other states where wages are lower.

The strike is affecting production of GTF engines, which power top-selling aircraft such as the Airbus A320neo and the F-35 fighter jet. In an attempt to continue production and break the strike, Pratt & Whitney has brought in non-union company engineers to operate machinery and maintain production. The strikebreakers were required to undergo a skills assessment last week to see if they could be used in production roles.

Some engineering projects have been paused as a result. Pratt & Whitney is the second largest producer of commercial airplane engines in the world behind GE Aviation, and is under pressure from customers such as Airbus and the US military to supply parts. Analysts have warned that a prolonged strike could further exacerbate production delays and supply chain challenges for the global aerospace industry.

The IAM and other unions are doing everything to isolate the strikers. Some 2,500 draftsmen, members of the Marine Draftsmen's Association-United Auto Workers (UAW), were set to strike on May 18 at the nearby General Dynamics Electric Boat in Groton, Connecticut. The workers who produce submarines for the US Navy had voted by 90 percent for strike action.

However, the UAW announced a last-minute deal preventing simultaneous strikes at General Dynamics, Pratt & Whitney and Lockheed Martin, which all play a vital role in US military production. Nine hundred UAW members have been on strike at Lockheed Martin facilities in Orlando, Florida and Denver, Colorado since May 1.

The strike at Pratt & Whitney comes as the US continues its participation in the genocide in Gaza, the US-NATO

proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and ratchets up its preparations for war against China. The strikes at Pratt & Whitney and Lockheed Martin are part of a spreading working class counter-offensive against the Trump administration's attacks on democratic rights, dismemberment of social programs, and the oligarchy's determination to make workers pay for the crisis of American capitalism and imperialist war.

Workers producing military equipment represent an enormous potential force to halt production and shipment of weapons and fight back against measures such as tariffs and cuts to social programs being used to fund the lurch toward a third world war. Workers must oppose the union apparatus' isolation of one strike from another.

The IAM and the UAW bureaucracies have proven over decades to be pro-company, forcing one massive sellout after another on workers who have been overwhelmingly opposed to management proposals. Union heads have boasted of their desire to back up new wars and the disastrous tariffs being put in place by the Trump administration.

The growing opposition in the working class to fascism, war and capitalism must find its expression in the building of rank-and-file committees, independent of the unions and the Democratic Party, at all workplaces as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

As negotiations resume, workers should fight for the formation an independent strike committee, which can link up their struggles with those of other workers in the defense industry to win their just demands. This committee should make an appeal to nonunion engineers to refuse to carry out production and insist that negotiations be led by trusted rank-and-file members and that all proceedings be public.



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