

Contracts expiring for GE Aerospace and GE Vernova workers in the US

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Contracts covering approximately 3,000 workers at GE Aerospace and GE Vernova are set to expire this Sunday, June 22.

GE Vernova manufactures energy equipment. The two companies were created through the corporate breakup of General Electric, finalized in 2023 and 2024. A third spinoff, GE HealthCare, remains on a separate timeline, with its main contract expiring in 2027.

The expiration affects workers at GE Aerospace facilities in Lynn, Massachusetts; Niskayuna, New York; Madisonville, Kentucky; and Strother Field, Kansas. Another 1,200 workers at Aerospace's Evendale and Erlanger plants in Ohio and Kentucky are covered under a separate contract that expires on August 17. Around 800 workers are at GE Vernova's plant in Schenectady, New York.

The current agreements with the International Union of Electrical Workers-Communications Workers of America (IUE-CWA) were two-year extensions of the earlier contract for the combined entity, which were rammed through in 2023 by the union apparatus to ensure "labor peace" during the separation. They provided a cumulative 12 percent wage increase, while continuing a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) freeze which began in 2015.

In addition to COLA restoration, workers are fighting the two-tier benefits system, which puts post-2012 hires on inferior 401(k) plans; a lack of meaningful protection against outsourcing, subcontracting and automation; and a ban on the right to strike.

Profits for GE's successors have soared. Last year, GE Aerospace alone made \$7.6 billion in profits—more than \$146,000 for each of its 52,000 global workers. Both GE Aerospace and GE Vernova are also major military contracts. GE Vernova recently signed a contract with the US Navy to provide Propulsion Load Systems for its next-generation Constellation-class frigates. GE Aerospace supplies jet engine components for combat aircraft.

The IUE-CWA has made the restoration of COLA a public centerpiece of its messaging. But the fact is that the union bureaucracy bargained away COLA and other gains years ago and offered no serious opposition to the breakup of GE.

In what appears to have been a quid pro quo, GE Vernova signed a "neutrality agreement" with the IUE-CWA in May 2023—just one month after the ratification of the contract extensions—covering two new facilities in New York tied to offshore wind turbine manufacturing.

The IUE-CWA is promoting divisive nationalist and militarist rhetoric. Its "Bring It Home GE" campaign is calling on the company to "Believe in America" and labels outsourcing a national liability. "Workers at GE manufacturing facilities work hard to build for America, including our military defense supplies," the campaign declares.

The union is making a direct appeal to US imperialism as the American ruling class launches catastrophic wars on multiple fronts. But any jobs created under this framework will be low-wage and high-exploitation. The campaign also divides GE workers in the US from their class brothers and sisters internationally and plays directly into the hands of Trump and the far right.

This trajectory mirrors that of other major unions. The United Auto Workers (UAW) has effectively endorsed World War III as a job creation program. The Teamsters' general president spoke at the Republican National Convention last year, denouncing "disloyal" executives.

The International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) has called Trump the best friend of the working class, while the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) has attacked Mexican railroaders as a national security risk. These nationalist appeals not only have never saved a single job but serve to cover up the role of the union bureaucracy in mass layoffs, while splitting the working class through xenophobia and

militarism.

The struggles of aerospace and defense workers over the past two years underscore the deep opposition developing among workers and the need for a rank-and-file rebellion against both management and the pro-corporate bureaucrats. In 2023, 6,000 workers at Spirit AeroSystems in Wichita, Kansas, went on strike, only to have a sellout contract imposed with the backing of the IAM and UAW. The workers had been laboring under a 10-year contract, which was extended another three years.

That same year, workers at the Wabtec locomotive plant in Erie, Pennsylvania, a facility once owned by GE, walked off the job in a militant strike that was shut down by the UE.

In 2024, 33,000 Boeing workers on the West Coast prepared to strike in the midst of a massive corporate safety scandal. The strike took the form of a semi-rebellion against the bureaucracy of International Association of Machinists, which had overridden opposition to impose wage freezes and contract extensions. Boeing workers responded by forming the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee to oppose both management and their partners in the union apparatus.

This year has seen a wave of similar struggles. At Lockheed Martin, Electric Boat and other military contractors, the UAW and IAM have repeatedly blocked or sold out strikes. In May, a strike by Pratt & Whitney engine workers in Connecticut came to an end with no gains. Meanwhile, GE Appliance workers in Louisville ratified a new contract earlier this year after rejecting an earlier tentative agreement in December. That plant, once a core GE facility, was sold to Chinese manufacturer Haier in 2016.

Only a tiny fraction of workers at the GE successor companies are in unions—around 9,000 in total, including 5,000 at GE Appliance. In the mid-20th century, around 80 to 100,000 GE workers were members of a union. The last nationwide strike at GE, a 102-day walkout in 1969–70, involved 164,000 workers.

This collapse in organization is not just the product of corporate union-busting and decades of plant closures but also of the historic betrayals of the union leadership. The IUE-CWA itself was formed in 1949 by the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) as an explicitly anti-communist competitor to the United Electrical workers (UE), during the red scare purges in which the bureaucracy rooted out the socialist workers who had built the industrial unions in the Great Depression.

The UE, which had ties to the Communist Party and was heavily involved in organizing GE in the 1930s and 40s, was expelled from the CIO as it consolidated its alliance with US imperialism during the Cold War. For its part, the Stalinist leadership of the UE had discredited itself with its wartime no-strike pledge and support for the brutal Stalin dictatorship.

Tens of thousands of workers at GE successor companies remain in non-union shops. The WSWS has learned that at the plant at Pensacola, Florida, half the roughly 500 workers are temps, earning about \$20 an hour. Regular workers are divided into tiers, with the lower tier—mostly hired after the 2008 financial crash—earning around 30 percent less than senior workers. “GE is making big money. Their stock is high. No one is speaking for us,” one worker said.

Workers must make an appeal to workers at all plants regardless of union status, as well as to GE workers in dozens of plants in Europe, Latin America and other parts of the globe.

A genuine fight for workers’ interests requires that the initiative be transferred from the hands of the union apparatus to the rank and file. New organizations of struggle, independent of the IUE-CWA and the entire pro-corporate trade union structure, must be built.

The conditions exist for the development of such a movement, but it must be consciously organized on the basis of internationalism, not American chauvinism, and class struggle, not appeals to the Pentagon and corporate shareholders.



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