Boeing workers connect strike to capitalism and war

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Boeing workers: Tell us what you're fighting for by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

More than 3,200 Boeing workers in Missouri and Illinois are now on their fourth day of strike action against the defense contractor. The strike has shut down production at three factories in the St. Louis area that build components for the US war machine, including F-15 warplanes and the F-47 stealth fighter that President Trump has designated as the Air Force's next-generation fighter. It is the first strike at the these plants since 1996.

The strike erupted after workers voted by a two-to-one margin to reject Boeing's second contract proposal, which was backed by International Association of Machinists Local 837. Workers are demanding an end to decades of union-backed concessions, which included stagnating wages amid soaring inflation, two-tier wage scales and the elimination of company-paid pensions.

Under the rejected deal, it would take 12 years for new employees to reach top pay. The 20 percent wage increase over four years would affect only a small number of workers and fails to address inflation that has devastated living standards. Workers also rejected Boeing's proposed Alternative Work Schedule (AWS) that would have imposed four consecutive 10-hour shifts or three consecutive 12-hour shifts.

The strike comes as Boeing has received a $20 billion contract from the Trump administration to build the F-47 fighter jet for war preparations against China. The St. Louis plants also produce weapons for Israel's assault on Gaza, including F-15s delivered under a $20 billion deal announced in November 2024.

Comments from workers on social media reveal the depth of opposition to Boeing's proposals and the broader conditions facing the working class.

One connected the attacks by Boeing on workers' living standards to the profit motive. "This company has become a joke. They put stock price and rate before safety and way before employee wellbeing. Executives have no idea what's going on and they don't want to know. It's purposeful ineptitude so they have plausible deniability while also knowing the company is getting squeezed dry for short term profit to boost the stock price. It's really what this country has become in letting Wall Street take over everything."

Another commented on the AWS, "It was originally rejected because of the proposed alternative work schedules being the number one issue. People around here really value their ability to get a lot of overtime, and the vibe was that AWS would be a way for the company to reduce how much [overtime] is needed if not eliminate it entirely down the road."

He continued: "With this second offer, it was basically the exact same except they scrapped AWS. I think most of the resentment comes from only a couple areas. First, everyone wants a more concrete time frame to hit top pay. We get raises through yearly GWI and progression twice a year, but there is no set time to top out. It seems it takes roughly 10-15 years, which is a lot longer than our brothers and sisters in the northwest."

The AWS was already implemented in the auto industry as a consequence of the 2009-10 bailouts. The Obama administration worked alongside the auto companies and with the complicity of the United Auto Workers to force through a workweek of four 10-hour shifts standard in the industry. It allowed GM, Ford and Stellantis to reduce overtime while forcing workers into ever-more backbreaking shifts.

In particular, it got rid of time-and-a-half pay after working eight hours and double time for Sunday work.

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In exchange for this and other massive givebacks, including halving the pay for new hires, the UAW received billions of dollars in GM and Chrysler stock as part of the bailout agreement.

Many of those union officials who "bargained" for this sellout were later exposed by an FBI corruption probe to have embezzled workers' dues money and accepted bribes from management. As one executive put it, these payoffs were to keep the union bureaucrats "fat, dumb and happy."

The Boeing worker added: "I think people are really upset with company leadership. They put out videos trying to get us to accept the offer by making claims that we're getting $13,000 in signing bonuses, but that's adding the $8,000 from our last contract from three years ago to the $5,000 they offered for this new four-year contract. The general vibe seemed to be 'Do they think we're stupid?'

"Every job classification has a max pay. Right now in STL the top pay for an assembly mechanic is $45/hr and some change. The contract we just voted on had ~$1.50 COLA fold in and 8% GWI for the first year, followed by three years of 4% GWI. However, the max pay was set to be frozen for year 2 and 3, so people who are maxed were only going to get a raise in year 1 and 4 bringing them up to ~$53/hr."

One worker also referenced the cynical attitude of corporations toward workers during the initial phases of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. "Our men and women are worth more! They were the essential workers who was at work everyday wearing a mask while everyone else was working from home. Now was your chance to prove how essential they were and you did not back your employees."

The strike takes place against the backdrop of broader economic attacks on the working class. A Boeing worker from the Seattle area who participated in last year's strike spoke to the WSWS and warned that Trump's tariffs are undermining the wage gains workers fought to achieve. "We barely made it without the tariffs, and now we have even less."

"We don't have layoffs, but the cost of living has gone up," he reported. "Gas went up. The average rent in my area went from about $2,500 a month to $3,000 a month. And that's for a two-bedroom apartment, not for a house. The tariffs took effect instantly while wage increases are over multiple years. We can't live like that and the St. Louis workers won't be able to either."

The Boeing worker also connected the economic crisis to broader political issues. "Trump is a disaster for the US economy. This guy is like a wild zone rapid shooter. I have no idea what this guy is thinking. Nobody knows what exactly he's thinking.

"And under him we're still fighting all these wars. We're fighting Israeli wars. We're using our resources to attack other countries, and it's making our quality of life go straight down."

The strike at Boeing's defense plants represents a direct challenge to the war machine at a time when the ruling class is preparing for expanded military conflicts. The Trump administration has already signaled that it views the strike as a threat to national security, with media outlets warning about disruptions to weapons production.

The greatest obstacle facing workers is not Boeing management but the IAM bureaucracy, which functions as an extension of corporate management and the state. The union sabotaged last year's strike by 30,000 machinists in the Pacific Northwest and is working to isolate the current strike.

Boeing workers must organize a fight not just against Boeing management but the IAM apparatus and form independent rank-and-file committees to coordinate their struggle with workers across the country. The fight at Boeing is part of a growing wave of working class resistance that must be organized outside the corrupt union bureaucracies and connected to the broader fight against war and the capitalist system that drives it.

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