

The 2025 Boeing strike and the lessons of the 2014 contract extension

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The strike by more than 3,200 Boeing machinists in Missouri and Illinois entered its second week on Monday. Three factories in the St. Louis area producing war materiel for US imperialism remain idle, including facilities manufacturing the F/A-18 Super Hornet, EA-18G Growler, F-15 Eagle and T-7A Red Hawk trainer aircraft, and the new F-47 stealth fighter commissioned by President Donald Trump.

Production of the MQ-25 Stingray refueling drone, built in Mascoutah, Illinois, and components for Boeing's 777X commercial aircraft have also been affected.

Workers walked out at the weapons manufacturer after a 99 percent strike authorization vote on August 4, followed by the rejection of two successive contracts proposed by Boeing and backed by the leadership of International Association of Machinists (IAM) Local 837. Workers are determined to oppose a deal that would force new employees to wait 12 years to reach top pay, with 20 percent wage increases that tariff-driven inflation would rapidly erode.

As Boeing worker Eric Easter told local NBC affiliate KSDK, "We all just want to not have to work 70-80 hours a week to make ends meet."

To win their fight, workers must critically examine the lessons of the 2014 contract struggle, recognize the role of the IAM bureaucracy, and take urgent steps to form rank-and-file committees to enforce the democratic will of workers on the shop floor.

The 2014 contract extension for Boeing's St. Louis machinists was passed in February, less than two months after a similar extension was pushed through for the much larger workforce in the Seattle area.

In Seattle, the leadership of IAM 751 deliberately scheduled a vote in early January, knowing that much of its veteran membership was still away on vacation

for the winter holidays. In a vote that supposedly passed by a razor thin 51-to-49 percent margin, workers were stripped of their pensions, faced higher healthcare costs, and suffered reduced wages under a contract that was essentially identical to one they had rejected by a 2-to-1 margin in November of the previous year.

Critically, by forcing through a contract for machinists in the Puget Sound, the IAM isolated workers in St. Louis and elsewhere, leaving them in a far weaker position to resist Boeing's dictates. Their contract mirrored what was imposed on their brothers and sisters in Washington and Oregon, including the elimination of defined-benefit pensions, the introduction of a two-tier wage system, soaring healthcare costs and wages that lagged well behind inflation.

Part of the vote in Seattle was secured by Boeing's naked attempt to bribe workers, including an \$8,000 signing bonus and a buyout offer for senior employees.

But the most critical role of securing the seven-and-a-half year extension was played by the IAM 837 bureaucracy and its 12-person bargaining committee. Speaking in the wake of the vote announcement, then-IAM District 837 President Gordon King threatened that, "If (the vote) would have went the other way...we would have just went to the bargaining table in January 2015 with probably about 300 to 500 laid off and no winning of new work because we didn't get the wage rates down comparable to what they needed to bid on future projects."

King also praised the two-tier wage structure, claiming the new wages were not "too far off from traditional pay scales that are out there," and that "they would put the company in a better position to bid for future work." He added, "You were going to be looking at layoffs, layoffs, layoffs and no potential for

new work.”

In reality, the defense contractor had just reported a 6 percent year-over-year increase in revenue to \$86.6 billion. Net earnings had risen 18 percent to \$4.6 billion.

The IAM International leadership also saw this as an opportunity to separate the contract expirations of the St. Louis- and Seattle-area workforces and prevent a unified struggle across the entire company. This is why the contract for the 33,000 workers in IAM 751 expired last year, while the contract for the 3,200 workers in IAM 837 expired this year.

In 2014, Boeing estimated that it saved \$80 million in the first quarter alone after the contract extension for St. Louis workers. And it estimated savings of \$140 million a quarter as a result of eliminating pensions for Seattle machinists.

Moreover, wages for Boeing workers in St. Louis rose only 2 percent over the course of their contract extension—an average of just 0.27 percent per year—while inflation averaged 2.5 to 3 percent, amounting to an effective pay cut. Housing costs have soared since 2014, with the median home price in St. Louis reaching \$260,000 in 2025 and housing inflation running at 5.2 percent annually.

While the workforce has grown from 2,400 in 2014 to 3,200 today, the new hires, under the two-tier wage system, earned between 8 and 49 percent less than existing workers in identical job classifications. Many entry-level positions started as low as \$12 an hour, rising to only \$15 under a Biden-era mandate establishing a still-inadequate \$15 minimum wage for all federal contractors.

The repeated betrayals by the IAM flow from the interests of the trade union apparatus itself, which is hostile to the workers it claims to represent. Tied to the defense of the capitalist profit system and committed to a nationalist program, the union bureaucracy responds to threats by multinational corporations like Boeing to shift production or impose mass layoffs by pressuring workers to accept wage cuts, benefit reductions and other concessions in order to remain “competitive” in a never-ending race to the bottom.

A particularly rotten role in pushing through the 2014 contracts was played by the pseudo-left publication *Labor Notes*. At the time, it claimed that because workers were still under contract when Boeing

demanded concessions, they “had no strike weapon to provide leverage”—even after acknowledging that Boeing had itself torn up contract expiration dates in 2011 and 2013, threatening to move work unless workers accepted its demands.

At most, *Labor Notes* supported removing IAM International President Tom Buffenbarger, while in the same breath allowing that “maybe ... pensions are a thing of the past.”

The lesson of the 2014 contract fight is that Boeing workers can defend their jobs, wages and conditions only by organizing independently of the IAM bureaucracy and the pseudo-left groups that defend it. The isolation of the strike in St. Louis must be broken through the establishment of rank-and-file committees—democratically- controlled bodies rooted on the shop floor—to place the conduct of the struggle in the hands of the workers themselves.

These committees must outline workers’ demands—an end to tiered wages, immediate top pay, cost-of-living adjustments, expanded paid leave and full retirement—and work to mobilize support across the entire working class.



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