

# Striking Boeing workers in St. Louis speak out against poverty pay, IAM bureaucrats

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*Are you a Boeing worker? Fill out the form at the bottom of this article for information on joining a rank-and-file strike committee.*

The strike by more than 3,200 Boeing workers in Missouri and Illinois against the weapons manufacturer is now continuing into its third week. The production of critical components for American military aircraft, including F-15 warplanes, the next-generation F-47 stealth fighter, as well as components for commercial planes produced in the St. Louis area have all been brought to a standstill. The strike, which began after an overwhelming rejection of the company's "best and final" offer, is the first at the plants since 1996.

The strike is not just a fight for better pay but a challenge to decades of union-backed concessions, such as the elimination of company-paid pensions and the implementation of a two-tier wage system. The rejected deal would have required new employees to work for at least 12 years to reach top pay. Workers also noted that the company's proposed 20 percent raise over four years would not offset what they have lost due to inflation and would only apply to a small number of workers.

The strike is also a challenge to the military-industrial complex and the two pro-imperialist parties. It poses the need for a movement in the working class to put an end to the criminal US-backed wars.

The International Association of Machinists is doing everything it can to isolate the strike, just as it had done to the strike by Boeing's civilian aircraft makers last year. Local 837 officials had unsuccessfully attempted to ram through the contract, triggering outrage from the rank and file. Last week, it made an appeal to ultra-right Senator Josh Hawley, a close Trump ally and January 6 co-conspirator, to help end the strike.

The critical issue, the WSWs explained in a statement Friday, is that "Boeing workers must turn to their real allies: workers in other defense plants, commercial aerospace facilities and industries throughout the region and internationally.

"This requires the formation of an independent Boeing St. Louis Rank-and-File Committee to take the conduct of the strike out of the hands of the bureaucracy and into the democratic control of workers themselves."

A striking worker, Evan, spoke with the WSWs about the conditions that led to the strike and the frustration among

workers.

Evan, an assembly mechanic, explained the core issues driving the strike. "We just feel like we're getting underpaid for the jobs that we're doing," he said. "We want a better offer to feel respected for the work that we put in." He noted that "a lot of people are barely getting by, and they have to go through a lot of school and a lot of training to work here.

"I'm in the low \$20s [per hour] in terms of pay, and I'm still at home with my parents. I have a child, and I can't afford a decent apartment." He believes a comfortable wage to live in the area would be "between, like, 35 to 40" dollars per hour. He added, "A lot of people ... aren't able to buy houses or apartments or really have a family in today's economy because we're getting the bare minimum."

The chasm between Boeing's profits and workers' pay is a major source of anger for workers like Evan, who has a college degree and several different machinist certifications, including security clearance to work on Boeing's military products.

"It seems like it's not paying off," he said, "I feel like I am just getting the bare minimum for the work that I've done and the schooling that I've gone through." He sees the company's offer as a "slap in the face and just a lack of respect for the workers." He explained, "The company is receiving billions while we're getting just a bare minimum to the point where ... people aren't even getting enough to have a family, to even raise a family, to even afford a house."

Evan emphasized that he and his coworkers are "doing real high-level, high-tech work, and none of us are comfortable." He argued that workers should be able to make a comfortable living working a standard 40 hours. He shared that many workers have to rely on working overtime hours just to make ends meet. "Overtime should be extra. We shouldn't have to do overtime just to get comfortable."

Several other workers spoke about their motivations for striking. "Everybody needs to be treated equally," one worker said. "In my mind, I'm asking to be treated at least as well as others." He noted the vast disparity between workers and corporate management, saying, "there's a guy up the road there ... he got like, well over a million dollars to take his job just as a signing bonus telling us that we shouldn't earn what we earn.

A multibillion-dollar company is bringing people in with starting pay at \$18 an hour.”

The worker criticized the company’s contract for attempting to create divisions, saying, “not only are they sowing division between sites, but also between workers with different security clearance.” He said the company uses this to “pit us against each other.”

A third worker stated that the main issues in the strike for him were “better vacation, sick time, general wage increase and Zoom.” Workers explained that a key demand was an inclusion in the contract of “zoom to the top,” which would shorten that amount of time it takes for workers to earn the highest pay rate.

Under the current system, a worker would have to be employed with Boeing for 15 years to earn the top pay. The current contract had “frozen” the top of the pay scale, keeping workers who earned it unable to receive their raise accumulating losses of up to \$15,000 per year for some workers.

The worker reflected that he and his coworkers “felt more financially stable before the last contract since the raise did not keep up with inflation.” He added, “We are supposed to have COLA (cost-of-living adjustments), but they are capped off and are less than what the actual inflation rate has been.”

Another worker spoke on behalf of veteran workers, who are being pushed out because they have reached the higher pay scale. “My main issue is the company doesn’t recognize the dwindling skill pool,” he said. “A lot of older workers are still sticking around because they’re dedicated to the job,” but the company “doesn’t value them the way that they should.”

He added that those “old guys are the people that keep the ball moving when things get difficult, and we have problems that don’t come up very often.” In his three years at the plant, he has seen three coworkers leave, resulting in “90 years combined experience gone.” He added, “One of my best friends is looking for a job right now ... he might not come back,” representing “25 years of experience the company’s losing.”

This loss “makes my job harder,” he stated. He added that the company’s end goal is to “get the job done, regardless of how good it looks.” But this strategy “gets people killed from time to time.”

When asked about the role of the International Association of Machinists officials in the strike, one worker said, “I knew there was a big disconnect there from the union leadership to what we wanted because it seemed like they weren’t preparing for a strike, and all of us were.” The workers recalled a union meeting when the IAM sought to convince workers to accept

the contract, but workers shouted the officials down.

“When they (the IAM) finally opened the floor to questions, the first guy to get on the microphone just shouted ‘F\*\*K YOU!’ at them.” The Boeing-IAM contract would be overwhelmingly rejected by the rank and file. Workers reported that the vote on the contract was 97 percent against.

The strike at Boeing is at a critical juncture. As it stands, production at the facility is stalled, and workers are in a powerful position to win major gains after decades of concessions and attacks on their standard of living. However, they must break through the isolation and sabotage of the strike by the IAM bureaucracy, whose interests are in securing an agreement as soon as possible to resume collecting dues payments while paying out as little strike pay as possible.

To win, Boeing workers must take the leadership of the strike into their own hands. A rank-and-file strike committee must be organized to throw out the IAM bureaucracy and replace them with a democratically elected leadership, who can take control of the strike fund, quadruple strike pay to at least \$800 per week to sustain a real fight.

Additionally, the strike should be expanded with flying pickets sent to nearby factories like the GM Wentzville assembly plant. There is major support for the Boeing workers in every section of the working class. The path to victory lies in taking the offensive and expanding the strike, not passively waiting for the company and the IAM to plot against the rank and file.



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