

GE Aerospace strikers: “There’s got to be a line in the sand—that’s what we’re doing”

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Are you a striking GE Aerospace or Boeing worker? To build rank-and-file committees to transfer power from the union apparatus to workers on the shop floor, fill out the form at the end of this article.

More than 640 workers have been on strike for a week at GE Aerospace’s facilities in Evendale, Ohio and Erlanger, Kentucky to oppose the giant aircraft engine manufacturer’s demand for sweeping concessions. The walkout at the Cincinnati area plants, the first since 1988, is part of a growing wave of struggles by defense industry workers, which also includes the ongoing strike by 3,200 workers at Boeing’s jet fighter plants in the St. Louis area.

On Thursday, Boeing announced plans to hire “permanent replacement workers” to break the nearly five-week strike by workers who have rejected two pro-company deals, which were brought back by the International Association of Machinists (IAM) bureaucracy.

The defense companies have been emboldened by the Trump administration, which has fired nearly 300,000 federal workers, stripped another 445,000 of their collective bargaining rights in August alone and is deploying military troops to major American cities to crush popular opposition to its fascist policies.

GE Aerospace, which has secured billions of dollars in military and civilian contracts from the Trump administration, is demanding a nearly 40 percent hike in out-of-pocket health care costs while offering a paltry 12 percent raise over the next three years. The company has brought in managers from throughout the country to keep operations going and is demanding that United Auto Workers leaders bring back its “record offer” to the membership for a vote.

Far from opposing this, UAW President Shawn Fain and the rest of the union apparatus are conducting

business as usual: isolating the strike, starving workers with \$500 a week in strike pay, and urging workers to rely on negotiations and appeals to the Democratic Party to end “corporate greed.” UAW Local 647 officials have promoted Democratic politicians, including bringing former US Senator Sherrod Brown to the picket line for a photo-op for his election campaign. Brown voted for the bipartisan bill to outlaw the 2022 railroad strike and impose a pro-corporate contract that workers had previously rejected.

In discussions with a *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team, striking workers expressed their determination to fight and grappled with broader political questions confronting the working class, including the emergence of a corporate-financial oligarchy, which controls both political parties. There was wide and sympathetic support for the call by International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) for workers to take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands, unite with Boeing workers and develop an industrial and political counter-offensive against capitalist exploitation, dictatorship and war.

“The corporate heads don’t want to budge on anything,” a worker at the Erlanger distribution center with 19 years told the WSWS. “They’ve brought in managers from around the country to try to do our work because we handle \$72 million to \$100 million a day in parts here. They have other distribution centers in Indiana and North Carolina, but they are losing big business because we shut this down.”

He said the company’s supposedly record offer was “ridiculous.” “Our health care costs are already expensive. A lot of workers are paying \$8,000 a year in deductibles for their families. You pay for everything out of pocket until you hit that and only after does the

company cover 80 percent of the costs. I only hit my deductible last year because my son broke his leg.

“I remember when you only had to pay \$25 or \$50 in co-pays to see a doctor and everything else was taken care of. I don’t think anybody does that anymore. Now they want us to pay a 40 percent increase in costs. And we’re only getting a 12 percent raise.”

He said workers also wanted more paid time off because of the physical and mental stress of the work. “When you first get here, you automatically get 10 days off a year. But you don’t get any increase in time off until five years. After that, you have a whole decade to wait before you get any more time.

“This is my fifth contract, and all they have been doing is taking, taking, taking and not giving anything. You get to a point where you say, ‘The hell with it, we have to do something.’”

The WSWS reporters said workers in the US had to oppose martial law, the deployment of the National Guard and other repressive measures, and that Trump planned to use state violence to crush strikes and other opposition by the working class.

“I heard that it was rough for the steelworkers and coal miners to win their rights,” the GE worker said, adding, “it’s crazy that Trump is deploying troops to Los Angeles and Washington D.C., and threatening other cities too.” But there was a method to this madness, they told him. The fascist president knows he will face massive opposition to the destruction of Social Security, and then want to return workers to conditions of industrial slavery to boost the wealth of the oligarchy and fund new wars.

“That’s what they are trying to do here,” the worker interjected, pointing to the \$89 million pay package.”

Another Erlanger worker who has gone through six contracts since 2005 said, “We haven’t gained anything but a holiday. The year we lost our pension we got Veterans Day. That’s the only gain we’ve got. The last contract we got a decent raise but had to pay more for health care. We lost whatever we gained.”

After nearly four decades in which the union bureaucracy blocked strike action and accepted one concession after another, workers welcomed the opportunity to fight back, a veteran worker at the Evendale plant said. “Everybody has been tired for a long time of not fighting. We are tired of giving everything to the company. We give, give, give, and

they turn around and say, ‘Okay, what more can you give me?’

“A lot of workers, particularly in my plant, voted for Trump,” he said. “But they see the CEO Larry Culp making \$89 million and the company giving billions to the stockholders while their health insurance goes up. They all hate it, and it makes them angry.”

“As a single man, I’ve not met my deductible yet,” a striker in Evendale said. “So, all year long, I’m constantly paying every medical thing out of pocket. So that’s the biggest reason we’re out here, fighting for a fair health care deal.

“I see our fight is trying to look out for our future. You know, I have no children, but a lot of these guys have children, grandkids, things like that. I feel like what we’re doing today is going to make things better for them when they come through.

“I scroll through Facebook, and it seems like a lot of corporations across the country are on strike right now. It would be something if we shut the country down. If the trucks stopped rolling. If we got every worker out there, it would really speak a big message.”

“It’s finally the last straw breaking the camel’s back,” another striker at Evendale said. “Everybody in this country is struggling right now. And then they want more. The working class, we just need to be stronger.”

Another worker said, “It takes too long to get your vacation. I’m going to have 15 years here. You get four weeks. That’s crazy. I left Delta—a non-union company—and I gave up five weeks and to get two weeks here.

“If I get my Social Security, I’ll be amazed. That’s what I worried about. I’ve been paying that for all my life. I definitely want everybody to have it. But they want to take it for political gain.

“There’s got to be a line in the sand. That’s what we’re doing. We’re putting our foot down and saying we’re not doing this anymore.”



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