

Boeing defense workers reject 4th company offer: Rank and file must take control of strike

Alexander Fangmann
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On Sunday, Boeing defense workers in the St. Louis area voted to reject the company's insultingly inadequate offer for a fourth time, extending the strike, which has now entered week 13. However, the slim margin of the vote—51 to 49 percent—puts the strike by 3,200 workers in real danger and has emboldened the defense contractor's executives to press ahead with their concessionary demands.

The five-year offer was largely the same deal workers had rejected in three previous votes. The ratification bonus was lowered from \$4,000 to \$3,000, with workers instead being offered \$3,000 in Boeing shares that vest over three years, and a fourth-year retention bonus of \$1,000. Workers at the top of the pay scale would see slight improvements in the fourth year of the contract but at the expense of reduced hourly incentive pay.

In advance of the vote Boeing St. Louis Vice President of Air Dominance Dan Gillian wrote in a letter to workers, "To fund the increases in this offer, we had to make trade-offs by reducing the amount of the annual attendance progression and additive by \$0.25 per hour." Gillian and Boeing executives have flatly refused to consider any overall increase in the cost of the contract, and every subsequent offer from the company has only involved moving money around. Boeing has the backing of Wall Street and the White House, which require expanded war production at the lowest possible cost.

As late as Wednesday, the bargaining committee for International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) District 837 had suggested it would not be calling another vote, posting, "We've said it many times, and we'll say it again: We will not vote on an

insulting offer."

On Thursday, the union did an about-face, calling for a vote on the deal, which they cynically claimed to oppose. It is wholly possible IAM officials thought they had worn workers down enough to obtain a narrow ratification vote. In any case, the IAM bureaucracy is calculating how much longer it will take to break the resistance of the rank and file and starve them into submission.

Despite having their health insurance terminated at the end of August and being forced to get by on just \$300 per week in strike pay, workers are determined to fight. The strike has won wide support among workers across the country and internationally, including from 33,000 Boeing commercial aviation workers in the Pacific Northwest who struck for 54 days in 2024.

During that strike, workers repeatedly rejected IAM-backed deals. Union officials had no intention of calling a strike in the defense division but had no choice after workers rejected the initial deal the union recommended.

The IAM bureaucracy does not have a strategy to win the strike but to defeat it. It has repeatedly brought back essentially the same agreement while filing a filing a toothless Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) charge with the Trump-controlled National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Like its Democratic Party allies, the union bureaucracy fears a mass movement of the working class far more than accommodating themselves to a fascist dictatorship.

The outcome of this struggle depends entirely on the initiative of rank-and-file workers themselves. The first step needed is the formation of a Boeing St. Louis Workers Rank-and-File Committee to put forward

workers' demands, oversee all contract talks and outline a strategy to win this struggle.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) recommends that workers demand:

- **\$1,000 a week in strike pay**
- **Workers' control over picketing and the organization of flying pickets to extend the strike to other sections of workers**
- **The halting of all training of strikebreakers**
- **Appeals for solidarity strikes from machinists on the commercial side of Boeing, as well as from company engineers**
- **Rank-and-file control over all talks to ensure that the fight is carried out to get workers what they need, not what the company or government claims can be afforded.**

Following the defeat of the latest proposal, IAM International President Brian Bryant said in a statement, “Boeing claimed they listened to their employees—the result of today’s vote proves they have not. Boeing’s corporate executives continue to insult the very people who build the world’s most advanced military aircraft—the same planes and military systems that keep our service members and nation safe.”

In a similar vein, an IAM statement on the vote complained that Boeing’s “refusal to offer fair contract continues to threaten military readiness.” This is a direct appeal for the Trump administration to intervene to end any further disruption of American imperialism’s war machine. In August, IAM President Bryant said, “I would request the president of the United States get involved in these negotiations and get this company back to the table since they are the ones who are building the military planes for his military.”

The strike has significantly impacted Boeing’s operations in St. Louis and the US military. At a Senate Armed Services Committee meeting on October 9, General Kenneth Wilsbach, commander of the Pacific Air Forces, revealed that deliveries of the new F-15EX fighter jet have been delayed by the strike. Out of 12 jets due to be delivered by the end of the year, only six have been supplied so far.

The impact of the strike on Boeing’s finances will become more apparent on Wednesday, when the company is set to reveal third quarter earnings. Boeing’s defense division accounts for one-third of the

company’s revenue, despite employing a workforce just a fraction of the size of the division producing commercial airplanes. The Trump administration has directly subsidized Boeing with billions in military contracts.

Company executives responded to the defeat of their contract by saying, “The union’s statement is misleading since the vote failed by the slimmest of margins, 51% to 49%. We are turning our focus to executing the next phase of our contingency plan in support of our customers.”

Boeing is actively hiring replacement workers and outsourcing work to third parties to break the strike. According to an internal company memo, cited by Reuters, Boeing executives said the first batch of replacement workers started training on October 2 for munitions and aircraft assembly positions.

At present, Trump is relying on the IAM bureaucracy to sell out the strike, and the administration has dispatched a federal mediator to oversee “negotiations.” But the fascist president in the White House is determined to resume full military production as soon as possible and is ready to use far more repressive measures if the strike continues. The state repression being directed against immigrant workers today will be directed against striking workers tomorrow.

That is why the fight of the Boeing workers to win their just demands is directly connected to the fight to establish rank-and-file committees in every factory, workplace and neighborhood to mobilize the enormous social power of the working class against fascist dictatorship and capitalist oligarchy.

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