

# IAM shuts down four-month Boeing strike, ignores workers' major demands

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24 November 2025

More than 3,200 Boeing defense workers in the St. Louis area voted on November 13 to accept a five-year contract, ending a 15-week strike that had shut down production of fighter jets and weapons systems critical to the US war machine.

The 68 to 32 percent vote came after workers had rejected four previous company offers. Those rejections were a sign of militancy and defiance, but the critical element allowing the company to end the strike was its isolation by the bureaucracy of the International Association of Machinists, which allowed Boeing to starve workers into submission.

The result is a contract that is even worse than Boeing's initial offer. The 24 percent wage increase is over 5 years—8 percent in the first year and 4 percent in subsequent years—instead of 20 percent over 4 years, locking in workers to wages well below Trump's tariffs and skyrocketing inflation for an extra year. And the \$6,000 signing bonus makes up next to nothing compared to the lost wages throughout the strike.

Nor were any of the other demands of the workers met. Under the new agreement, workers will still face extended timelines to reach top pay, with the Byzantine wage progression system remaining largely intact. Healthcare costs remain unaffordable for many workers, and the improvements in 401(k) match that workers sought were denied. And most significantly, the contract provides no restoration of defined-benefit pensions, which were eliminated in the 2014 contract extension that Boeing and the IAM bureaucracy conspired to force through.

The strike was part of a significant upsurge in the class struggle in recent months. This includes strikes by tens of thousands of healthcare workers on the west coast at Kaiser Permanente and UC Health, as well as healthcare strikes in New Orleans, Minnesota, Wisconsin and western Michigan. Other strikes by industrial workers include the Libbey Glass strike in Toledo, Ohio.

There is also growing outrage over mass layoffs, which have totaled 1.1 million so far this year by US companies, and the continuous string of industrial disasters driven by profit. Boeing is at the forefront of both. It announced 17,000 layoffs late last year, and management's deliberate concealment of safety issues with the 737-MAX airliner led to two fatal crashes and many other near-disasters.

Above all, there is growing opposition from below against the Trump government. Much of the Boeing strike unfolded during the government shutdown, during which the White House cut off food stamps, allowing millions to go hungry. Resistance is growing rapidly to the deployment of ICE agents to terrorize immigrants in major cities, and workers and youth are moving to the left.

Objectively, the Boeing strike was a fight against the government and US imperialism. It dealt a blow against the ongoing war plans of the Trump administration against Venezuela, Iran, Russia and China, all of which are also supported by the Democratic party.

Workers at the St. Louis, St. Charles and Mascoutah plants build F-15 and F-18 fighter jets, advanced drones, and components for the new F-47 stealth fighter commissioned by President Trump. According to testimony from the commander of Pacific Air Forces, F-15EX deliveries have fallen behind schedule.

During the strike, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the Pentagon is demanding a doubling and even quadrupling of missile production in preparation for war against China, in particular Patriot anti-air missiles, which are produced by Boeing at other facilities.

There was enormous potential to build this strike into a broader, independent movement of the working class against war and oligarchy. But activating this potential anywhere is possible only through a rebellion against the sellout union bureaucracy. A genuine fight requires new

leadership, rank-and-file committees, to break out of isolation imposed from above.

That the strike was betrayed was not due to lack of resolve, as the rejection of four successive contract offers showed. There was also enormous distrust of the IAM bureaucracy. The apparatus repeatedly recommended contracts that fell well below workers' demands, and also attempted to maneuver an end to the strike through a fraudulent "pre-ratification" vote in September.

Meanwhile, striking workers were only provided just \$200 per week in strike pay—later raised to \$300—forcing families to drain savings and face mounting debt. Meanwhile union officials continued drawing six-figure salaries from the IAM's nearly \$200 million in assets.

Moreover, the bureaucracy made no effort to mobilize the tens of thousands of other IAM members at Boeing facilities nationwide, particularly the 33,000 commercial aircraft workers in Washington, Oregon and California who struck last year.

In that struggle, 33,000 workers waged a seven-week fight that took the form of a semi-rebellion against IAM officials, repeatedly rejecting union-backed contracts. The bureaucracy ultimately forced through a deal that failed to restore pensions and provided wage increases below what workers demanded, paving the way for mass layoffs that the union made no effort to oppose.

The actions of the IAM gave Boeing management the upper hand, in spite of the resolve of workers. Boeing began hiring permanent replacement workers in September and announced plans to relocate some production away from St. Louis, confident that the IAM bureaucracy would not wage any serious fight over these attacks against the workforce.

The bureaucracy's orientation is not to the working class, but to Boeing management and the corporate political establishment. In August, IAM International President Brian Bryant told reporters he wanted "the president of the United States" to get involved, claiming Trump would support workers building "military planes for his military." Bryant and other IAM officials also appealed to Missouri Senator Josh Hawley, a central figure in Trump's January 6, 2021 coup attempt, to intervene in the dispute.

As a matter of fact, Trump did intervene heavily in the strike—by making sure Boeing continued to rake in the cash by negotiating tens of billions of dollars in foreign export deals. Last week, it announced the sale of 75 new 737 MAX-8, -9 and -10 jets to flydubai and another 11 737 MAX-8s to Ethiopian Airlines. The latter is

remarkable because a 737 MAX-8 plane operated by Ethiopian Airlines was the second of two MAX-8 crashes in October 2018 and March 2019.

Because of this, the company boasted that the strike had an "immaterial" impact on its Q3 earnings.

Insincere statements of "solidarity" from Democrats such as Senator Bernie Sanders were aimed at getting out in front of anger to help shut the strike down to get the American war machine back up and running at full capacity. This was shown by the letter from the House Armed Services Committee, drafted by Don Bacon (R-NE) and Donald Norcross (D-NJ), demanding that Boeing restore full production of "defense equipment that the United States government and our service members rely upon."

The chief lesson of the strike is the need for the determination and opposition of workers to find new outlets. Alternative structures, not beholden to management, the government of their lackeys in the union officialdom, are needed to give workers the power to countermand the latter's betrayals. Such rank-and-file committees will also serve to help workers break out of their isolation and connect their struggles into a broader fight for wages, healthcare, pensions, safety and other key demands. This must be connected to a fight for workers' power, against the entrenched power of the oligarchy.

Workers must also demand the retooling of military production lines for socially beneficial purposes, mass transit, renewable energy equipment, hospital machinery and more, rather than weapons of mass destruction. This must be part of a mass mobilization against the entire system of capitalist exploitation and its malignant outgrowths, dictatorship and war.



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