

Lake City ammunition strike in Missouri enters fourth week: Why the fight against Olin Winchester requires a struggle against imperialist war

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Are you a striking Olin Winchester worker? Fill out the form below to tell us about your fight. We will keep all submissions anonymous.

A strike by approximately 1,300 workers at the Lake City Army Ammunition Plant in Independence, Missouri is entering its fourth week without resolution. The workers, members of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) Local 778, walked out on April 5 after courageously rejecting a pro-company contract that enforced severe cuts to real wages amid historic inflation and maintained a punishing regime of forced, excessive overtime.

While the immediate demands of the workers are economic—centered on defending their living standards and winning back a semblance of work-life balance—the objective logic of their struggle brings them into a direct political collision with the US government and the machinery of military production.

The Lake City plant is a central artery of the US military-industrial complex, producing the vast majority of small-caliber ammunition for the United States Armed Forces. The context of this strike is of the highest strategic consequence. It is unfolding in the midst of a massive, blood-soaked war launched by the Trump administration against Iran. While a recently declared “indefinite ceasefire” has nominally paused direct military strikes, workers must be warned: this is an fraud. Accompanied by a continuing and illegal US naval blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, the ceasefire is not an end to the war or a step toward peace, but a tactical, armed truce.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has continuously warned, the assault on Iran is not an isolated conflict, but a major theater in the initial stages of a rapidly developing Third World War. The drive by American imperialism to subjugate Iran is inextricably linked to the US-NATO proxy war

against Russia and advanced preparations for a massive military confrontation with China.

While the initial phase of the US-Iran war was dominated by devastating aerial and naval missile strikes, Washington knows that the subjugation of the Eurasian landmass cannot be achieved from the air alone. Military experts and strategic think tanks have openly warned that the massive expenditure of munitions in the Middle East is exacerbating a severe crisis in US weapons stockpiles, undermining Washington’s advanced preparations for war with China. The immediate purpose of this ceasefire is to allow the US military to reposition its forces and frantically restock the arsenals of American imperialism for the inevitable next phases of global conflict, which will ultimately involve massive ground operations.

Therefore, the Pentagon is demanding uninterrupted production at Lake City to hoard vast supplies of small-arms ammunition in preparation for the bloody ground wars to come. This goes hand-in-hand with the automatic registration of millions of young people into the Selective Service System starting in December 2026, in preparation for the restoration of a military draft.

Regardless of which capitalist party occupies the White House, the drive toward World War III is a bipartisan project. The current eruption of imperialist barbarism under the Trump administration enjoys the full, active backing of the Democratic Party and the entire military-intelligence apparatus.

Because the military is demanding this massive stockpiling effort, the demands placed on defense manufacturing workers have reached intolerable levels. The mass production of ammunition is dangerous, exhausting work. Workers operate amid massive industrial presses and high-decibel metal stamping, facing constant exposure to toxic heavy metals such as lead, alongside volatile explosive

compounds. To meet the Pentagon's quotas, workers have been subjected to an exhausting regime of endless, forced overtime. This brutal setup deprives workers of time to rest, recover or see their families, destroying their health to guarantee an uninterrupted supply of bullets.

In stark contrast to the sacrifices demanded of the workers, Olin Winchester, the multi-billion-dollar defense contractor that operates the government-owned facility, is gorging itself on the profits of war. As the international death toll has climbed, Olin has raked in massive revenues, funneling this blood money directly into the pockets of its corporate executives and Wall Street investors. As its own corporate financial filings confirm, Olin routinely diverts hundreds of millions of dollars toward aggressive stock buyback programs and uninterrupted quarterly dividend payouts. The company expects the rank-and-file to accept effectively lowered wages—eaten away by years of inflation—while management liquidates the profits of global slaughter to enrich the major shareholders.

Olin and the Pentagon view this ongoing strike as an intolerable disruption to the preparation of the imperialist war machine. The striking workers are exposing a critical vulnerability in the supply chain of American imperialism, and the forces arrayed against them will be absolutely ruthless. The American ruling class cannot wage global war abroad without launching a ruthless war against the working class at home. The capitalist state will not tolerate any disruption to its military supply chains.

It is for this very reason that the IAM bureaucracy is deliberately isolating the workers and desperately trying to end the strike. The corporatist trade unions—which already function permanently as an appendage of corporate management and the capitalist state—drop all pretense of independence during a period of global war. They fuse even more directly with the state apparatus, openly functioning as an industrial police force to guarantee uninterrupted military production and brutally suppress the class struggle.

This dynamic was made explicitly clear at the union's strike rally earlier this week by Scott Brown, the Directing Business Representative for IAM Local 778. Rather than outlining a strategy to expand the strike and shut down Olin's scab operations, Brown essentially pleaded with management for a face-saving agreement to get war production back online: "Our members want to get back to work. We are ready to negotiate. But it takes two sides willing to find a fair, common ground."

In fact, Winchester Ammunition released a statement brazenly declaring that it continues to operate the facility "safely and reliably, in support of the U.S. Military" by using management and hundreds of strikebreakers who cross the picket line every day. The IAM is allowing this

strikebreaking to happen without lifting a finger to mobilize broader sections of the working class.

To win this battle, Lake City workers need a new strategy based on a clear understanding of the political forces arrayed against them. They are fighting not just Olin Winchester, but the bipartisan war machine, the capitalist state, and an IAM apparatus that is functioning as an agency of the government.

If this strike remains in the hands of the IAM, it will be isolated and suppressed. That is what the IAM bureaucracy did to end the four-month strike by 3,200 Boeing defense workers in the St. Louis area in 2025 and the seven-week strike by 33,000 Boeing aviation workers in the Pacific Northwest in 2024.

Workers at Lake City must urgently take the conduct of the strike into their own hands by forming a rank-and-file strike committee. This committee must outline non-negotiable demands—including a substantial wage increase that fully offsets inflation, the institution of automatic cost-of-living adjustments (COLA), and the total abolition of forced overtime.

But such a committee must recognize the political nature of this fight. It must break the isolation imposed by the IAM by sending delegations to other defense plants, manufacturing facilities, and logistics centers, appealing for broader working-class action. By organizing through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), workers can unite their struggle with the growing movement of the working class globally against austerity and capitalist exploitation.

The fight for decent living standards, for the right to a life free from exhausting exploitation, is inherently bound up with the fight against imperialist war. The working class must not be forced to sacrifice its health, its wages, and its democratic rights to build the arsenals for World War III. Instead, workers expropriate the war profiteers and convert the military machine into a socially useful industry.



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