

# “We need to stand together”: As Boeing strike continues, 525 Eaton Aerospace workers strike in Jackson, Michigan

George Kirby  
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Around 525 workers at the Eaton Corporation’s aerospace plant in Jackson, Michigan, have been on strike since September 16. Eaton Aerospace supplies parts for commercial and military aircraft.

The Eaton Aerospace workers at the Jackson plant have been working on an extended contract since July 19. The strike was called after the extension expired on September 5 and after workers voted down two tentative agreements brought by the United Auto Workers. Their main demands are to protect pensions for both high seniority and newer workers and to demand better retiree healthcare. Eaton is also threatening to create a second tier of workers, a practice known all too well at most manufacturing plants.

Eaton is a major transnational corporation that provides electrical products such as transformers and switchgears to companies such as Boeing, where 33,000 workers are currently on strike. It made a record \$6.4 billion in sales in the second quarter of this year alone.

In 2021, Eaton bought Cobham Mission Systems for \$2.8 billion and is now one of the 100 largest military defense suppliers in the world. Cobham supplied refueling probes for F-35 combat aircraft used by the US and its major military allies, including Israel, which is deploying them in the genocide in Gaza.

Conditions in the plants are brutal, with starting wages as low as \$15 an hour. In 2022, the workers at the Eaton Cobham facility in Iowa went on strike, rejecting sellout contracts from the International Association of Machinists.

The Eaton strike is part of a broader upsurge, which is taking the form of workers rebelling against sellouts backed by union bureaucrats. This includes the Boeing

strike, which was forced when workers voted down a contract by 95 percent. Last month, striking Dakkota auto parts workers had to fight five consecutive sellouts, which the UAW bureaucracy rammed down their throats. The UAW, confronted with mass anger over thousands of layoffs at Stellantis under the new contract, announced a strike vote Tuesday night in a livestream, which was met with hostile comments from autoworkers.

Workers must not wait for the bureaucracy to present a third rotten deal. They must form a rank-and-file committee like the one that was formed at Dakkota auto parts and discuss on their picket lines how to appeal for active support from their brothers and sisters at Boeing and elsewhere.

There is enormous support for such a joint struggle. “We are a big supplier to Boeing,” one older worker said. “We’re hoping to benefit from their strike since we ship to them. A lot of what we supply goes to Airbus, Boeing, government—all of it.”

The UAW bureaucrats tried to get in front of this with an open letter to the IAM at Boeing. But far from proposing joint actions, the letter had a funeral character, offering condolences to the fellow union bureaucrats for having had to call a strike. “I am sorry to hear that the Company has forced your hand to call a strike,” UAW Local 475 President Donnie Huffman wrote. “You are in our thoughts and prayers,” he concluded.

The Eaton worker continued: “We rejected two deals, and the second one the company handed out before the union could. They wanted to get more yes votes but got no votes. We didn’t have any knowledge of what was in the deal.”

Another worker said, “Certain things they won’t negotiate, like vacation. You have to be here 15 years to be eligible for four weeks of vacation, and it freezes at seven. They never deviate on this. I’ve been here 10 years.

“They were trying to buy us off with a signing bonus and wage increase while including concessions. They took away retiree medical benefits years ago. They gave us certain things, but we had to give up a lot more. Eaton moved everyone to a 401k [instead of a defined-benefit pension plan] ... It will be tough for some of these people; entry-level is not making a lot of money. We start out at \$15, the lowest-paying job, and after a year it is \$25. But you have to work a year and get a bid job.

“I wish they didn’t take so much from us,” he continued. “I counted on this money when I figured how much I had until retirement. ... I’m too close to retirement to start somewhere new. I already went through two plant closings before here. They refuse to negotiate, just a bump in wages and a signing bonus. That’s it, then they take the pension from us.”

Drawing parallels with the recent Dakkota auto parts strike, where workers rejected four consecutive sellouts, one worker said, “This isn’t our first rodeo either. We voted four times last contract.”

Workers reported on the safety issues inside the plant. “We deal with stuff like red oil, Skydrol [hydraulic fluid]. It’s all toxic. We handle that while putting the parts together, working 8-10 hours. We have these gloves, but we still get Skydrol on us.

“It’s like how my pops, who was a pipefitter, dealt with asbestos for 30 years.”

One worker discussed the hundreds of millions of dollars in the UAW strike fund. “That money should come back to workers when we retire. There’s no strike pay yet, so we’re taking a hit.” Another worker pointed to the nationalist rhetoric of Fain blaming “foreign” CEOs and workers. “It changes all the time. They always have the ‘big bad’ Japanese then and Mexicans now.”

Another coworker added, “The whole reason to come here was for our future, our kids and our family. You take away our pensions, there’s not many pensions out there already as it is. \$25 is not enough, with record profits, and the CEO sends us an email congratulating us for the high stock price and dividends. In their book

2+2=0, and we’re zero. The TAs were a joke. They still took away pensions.”

When asked about why the UAW bureaucracy would bring back two sellout TAs, he said, “That’s key! They shouldn’t even be bringing it back. Instead say, what the Hell? What do you think you fly the planes with? They want to continue putting money in their pockets.

“This strike is important. With the supplies we are making, we should be given more respect. We need to demand as a collective. With broader support we would be taken a lot more seriously. We’re taking this seriously. Whether it’s nonunion or union, we need to stand together!”



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