

Eaton aerospace workers in UK continue strike over pay

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Workers at Eaton Aerospace in Fareham in the south of England started a new round of strikes last week against a company pay offer which does nothing to address years of low pay and the cost-of-living crisis.

Eaton Corporation covers many sectors. Its aerospace division is a global supplier of aerospace fuel, hydraulics, and pneumatic systems for commercial and military use and filtration systems for industrial applications. The workers at Fareham make systems and equipment for multiple commercial and military aircraft, as well as for business jets. The facility specializes in items such as fuel indicators and gauges.

Unite, the union which represents the around 150 workers at the plant, previously held a six-day strike in September—following an overwhelming vote to reject the company’s “final offer”.

Eaton is offering fitters, technicians, supervisors and other staff a three-year deal, with a four percent pay rise for this year, 3.5 percent next year and three percent for the third year. This under conditions where the previous three-year deal in 2021 was far below inflation at the time, resulting in workers at the Fareham plant being paid a lot less than workers doing the same jobs at other plants in the UK.

Unite noted ahead of the strike that the top skilled rate at the plant is just £32,500 whereas average UK wages now sit at £35,700.

Any claim by the company that they cannot afford to provide workers a decent pay rise holds no water. Parent company Eaton Corporation made £2.9 billion in profits last year, including \$780 million in its aerospace division. Its directors were paid almost £50 million.

After workers voted to reject the deal, the company dug in its heels and refused to negotiate. Failing to reach an agreement to end the dispute, Unite had no

option but to call the present round of strikes, which cover 25 days in October and November. Upcoming strikes are set for October 21-26 and 29 and November 1, 4-9 and 11-16.

A *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team spoke to pickets as the latest action began. They distributed an article informing them about the ongoing struggle of Eaton workers in the US. On September 16, 525 workers at Eaton Aerospace in Jackson, Michigan, begun their fourth week on strike. The strike began after rank-and-file workers rejected two contract proposals backed by United Auto Workers Local 475 officials.

Most of the Fareham workers had not heard that their counterparts in Michigan had been striking as well but were fully supportive of their struggle. One worker noted: “I know it’s harder to go on strike in the US, so if they’re doing it, then the situation must be pretty bad over there.”

Workers told the WSWS that the company had recently sold the plant “for a pittance” and was planning on moving production to a smaller facility nearby starting from early 2028. It is unclear whether all the workers in Fareham will be transferred to the new plant.

One worker, who wanted to remain anonymous, was adamant that “the reason we are in this situation now is because of the last pay deal, three years ago. It was a three-year contract, and it wasn’t a great deal to begin with, but then you had the massive inflation [in 2021-2022] and we were left with nothing. The price for everything, food, mortgage, went up and we were left struggling to make ends meet.

“Now they say they want to give us 10.5 percent over three years, but that’s not good enough. We would need that amount over one year, to bring us in line with

workers at other plants.”

Another worker said “we don’t want another three-year deal. You don’t know what’s going to happen in three years”.

The wage deal being denounced by the workers was of course accepted by Unite without a fight.

Discussing the US strike and the necessity of uniting the strikes on both sides of the Atlantic in a common struggle, he supported the idea. “Otherwise, these multinational companies will just move jobs to where they can get away with paying people less. If it was an international struggle, they couldn’t do that.”

He pointed out that when he started working at the Fareham plant, in the 1980s, there were 2,000 workers. “Today there are barely 300 left, and it’s going to be even fewer in three years, when they move production [to the smaller plant].”

These comments, and events at the company over the last years fully attest to the fact that Eaton strikers in the US and Britain are involved not in a national but a global struggle.

As the WSWS noted in a September 30 article, “Over the last five years, the company has engaged in a savage downsizing and cost-cutting campaign, which has been unopposed by the UAW, the IAM and other union bureaucracies. Eaton has closed factories and wiped out thousands of jobs in Auburn, Indiana; Hastings, Nebraska; Toccoa, Georgia; Watertown, Wisconsin; Spencer and Shenandoah, Iowa; and Kings Mountain, North Carolina. In many cases, Eaton has shipped production of its auto, aircraft and residential electrical components to low-wage facilities in San Luis Potosi and Juarez, Mexico.”

Strikers at Fareham told the WSWS that not all workers at the plant are even involved in the action. While the majority was striking, picketers revealed that some workers were still in the plant. However, they said they did not condemn them, as some of them needed the money to pay their bills or feed their families, and the union is only offering them a measly £250 a week in strike pay, which is not enough to live on.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham is striking the usual demagogic pose that always precedes a sellout by the union. She declared, “This is a multi-billion-pound company making huge profits off the backs of our members, which could easily make a fair pay offer”.

Workers should be under no illusion: if the struggle is left to the union bureaucracy, it will seize on any meaningless concession from the company to wind up the struggle and spin it as a victory. This is the same pattern that Unite has used to demobilise workers in struggles over the past years, most recently at Tata Steel in Wales.

The way forward for workers is to form a rank-and-file committee to unify with their brothers and sisters at other plants and internationally. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and *World Socialist Web Site* will assist workers in that fight. For more information, contact us today through the form below.



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