

As Boeing workers vote on third sellout deal, parts supplier Eaton begins replacing striking workers at Michigan factory

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On Friday, the Eaton Corporation announced it was beginning to replace strikers at its aerospace parts plant in Jackson, Michigan. The 525 workers at the plant have been on strike for seven weeks, having rejected several sellout offers, including one two weeks ago which management calls its “last, best and final offer.”

Workers must rally to the defense of Eaton workers, particularly the 33,000 Boeing workers who have been on strike for nearly two months and who also have rejected numerous sellout contracts.

Significantly, Eaton’s strikebreaking was announced the day after the International Association of Machinists announced a new deal at Boeing almost identical to the one workers had rejected a week prior by 64 percent. That earlier rejection had a galvanizing impact on Eaton workers, who rejected their own deal brought by the United Auto Workers the following day.

In a statement Sunday night, the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee, founded in opposition to the sellouts from the IAM, declared: “In addition to rejecting this deal [in voting Monday], we must call for Eaton workers to be reinstated and their just demands met.”

Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party’s candidate for US vice president, issued a statement denouncing the use of scabs at Eaton, calling it “a warning to the whole working class: Whether Harris or Trump is in the White House, both corporate parties want to smash the resistance of the working class to their program of austerity and war.

“Boeing workers should reject this deal, which does not meet their demands for inflation-busting wages and the restoration of pensions, and join with Eaton workers ... to expand the network of rank-and-file committees,” he continued. “Only in this way can workers take the conduct of their struggle out of the hands of the corporatist union sellouts and fight for an all-out strike across the aerospace and defense industry.

“I call on workers throughout Michigan, including autoworkers fighting jobs cuts, striking Detroit Marathon workers and healthcare workers, to come to the defense of the Eaton workers by holding mass demonstrations and other common actions.”

Coordinated attacks on Eaton and Boeing strikes

In a statement Friday that Eaton has already made offers for 44 jobs, a company spokeswoman claimed that the Boeing strike “had no bearing” on the Eaton strike. This is absurd. Both workers are fighting against a corporate oligarchy which has clearly coordinated a campaign to break their strikes.

While Boeing cannot easily replace 33,000 people, CEO Kelly Ortberg has threatened that the next contract offer would be worse, not better in a bid to intimidate workers.

Critical assistance is being given to management at both companies by the union bureaucrats, who are terrified that if the strikes grow into a broader movement, it will undermine their close relations with management. Two rolling strikes at Eaton facilities in Illinois and in Britain are also underway, and opposition is growing to cost-cutting among global aerospace workers and in other industries.

The UAW bureaucrats have still not officially acknowledged Eaton’s use of scabs to break the strike. This further exposes their public campaign threatening strike action at automaker Stellantis, which is designed to get out in front of mass anger and deflect blame away from the sellout auto contracts they rammed through last year.

While launching a racist “America First” campaign against the Dutch-headquartered conglomerate, which includes what used to be Chrysler, the UAW has barely said anything about mass layoffs at GM or at Ford, which is slashing jobs at its electric vehicle plant in Dearborn, Michigan.

Its guilty silence is also of a piece with its strike-breaking against Dakota auto parts workers earlier this year, where they made workers vote five times on virtually the same contract.

Their guilty silence contrasts sharply with their violent threats against *World Socialist Web Site* campaigners, who were speaking to workers two weeks ago.

At Boeing, the IAM is urging workers to “settle this strike and move forward,” while District 751 President Jon Holden blandly repeated Ortberg’s strikebreaking threat in comments to the *Seattle Times*. Significantly, Holden admitted in that interview that the union endorsed the first deal, which workers rejected by 95 percent, because the company’s offer was contingent on it. In other words, they openly acted, and are acting, as management’s puppet.

Wall Street digs in its heels

After nearly two months, the corporate oligarchy has clearly made a decision to move more aggressively against the two strikes.

The first reason for this is political. The decision to hold its vote Monday, the day before the presidential election, reflects the need of the American ruling elite to end the strike before the full extent of the political civil war breaks out after November 5, as Donald Trump launches well-laid plans to overturn any result against him and install himself as dictator.

Both parties are frightened that this conflict could meet with a powerful response from the working class. Under these conditions, a strike wave could intersect with a political movement against fascism and dictatorship.

While the Democrats are the immediate target of Trump's conspiracy, they fear the threat from below because it would challenge their own fixation on the unpopular expanding wars in Europe and Asia, including the Gaza genocide. The Biden administration has dispatched acting Labor Secretary Julie Su to mediate the talks at Boeing in order to restart supply chains at the major defense contractor.

The second reason is the serious blow the strikes have already dealt to Wall Street. According to a recent study, the Boeing strike is now the costliest US work stoppage this century, at an estimated \$11.5 billion. Deliveries to major airlines have ground to a halt. According to the *Seattle Times*, Alaska Airlines was expecting 18 737-MAX aircraft this year and has only received 12. It is not clear if it will receive more, which has already cost the company millions.

The strike has had a significant impact on the national economy. Last month's report was the lowest in four years, with only 14,000 new jobs added. The Boeing strike was cited as a main factor, in addition to hurricanes Milton and Helene. Including suppliers, the strike has affected roughly 44,000 jobs.

There are also 10,000 suppliers for Boeing, at least one in every state in the country, which collectively have about 1.4 million employees. The aerospace giant also remains the largest US exporter, despite the numerous safety issues that have emerged this year as revealed by the two MAX 8 crashes in 2018 and 2019.

The shutdown of a major US manufacturer threatens not only Boeing shareholders but the entire financial system which is built on unsustainable levels of debt. Because of this, Wall Street has laid out immense resources to break the strike, including a \$10 billion loan to the company and plans to purchase \$25 billion in stock and other assets.

This exposes as a lie Boeing's claim that the restoration of pensions, workers' main demand, is "prohibitively expensive." It is concerned instead that this money be showered on Wall Street investors.

To that end, there is plenty of money wasted on graft in Boeing's defense contracts. A recent article in *Popular Science* revealed how Boeing overcharged for soap dispensers on C-17 cargo planes by nearly 8,000 percent. The company also charged the US Air Force \$22.2 million for 25 spare parts that government auditors "could not determine" if they were fairly priced, and

another \$4.3 million for nine parts that were not priced "fair or reasonable."

Lessons of past struggles

In a nervous article posted to its website on the latest Boeing deal, CNN attempted to present it to workers as a *fait accompli*. The article declares:

Union members have rejected offers recommended by their leadership in the past, only to accept a subsequent deal that is not much better. That happened in 2021, when members of the United Auto Workers union at farm and construction equipment maker John Deere accepted a deal similar to one they had previously rejected, ending a five-week strike there.

And it happened 10 years ago at Boeing, when about two-thirds of members rejected an offer that ended the pension plan. That was followed by 51 percent voting to accept roughly the same concessions offer rather than deal with Boeing's threat to build non-union plants around the country, which would potentially cost the jobs of many union members.

This only proves, however, that workers can only win their demands through a struggle against both management and the union bureaucrats. In particular, the John Deere strike was a seminal experience of the growing movement for rank-and-file committees. Earlier that year, workers at Volvo Trucks also formed a rank-and-file committee to fight the UAW sellouts after forcing a strike through multiple contract rejections.

As at Boeing, the struggle at John Deere continues, with the company announcing hundreds of layoffs this year which have gone without mention by the UAW.

The year after the strike, the bureaucracy put forward "reformer" Shawn Fain in union elections in order to get out in front of workers' anger. Since then, he has carried out even deeper cuts than his predecessors, while acting as a surrogate for the Biden administration.

The only genuine opposition to Fain came from Will Lehman, a socialist Mack Trucks worker who had earlier organized his coworkers to support the Volvo strike. Lehman ran on a campaign of abolishing, not reforming, the bureaucracy and replacing it with rank-and-file committees.



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