

# On second vote, SPEEA Technical Unit accepts Boeing's offer

SEATTLE — Technical workers at The Boeing Company approved a new four-year contract March 18 — a month after narrowly rejecting the exact same offer. The vote — 4,244 to 654 — puts an end to negotiations that have lasted nearly a year. The previous contracts expired Nov. 25, 2012.

Both Technical Unit and Professional Unit employees at Boeing are members of the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace (SPEEA) Local 2001, an affiliate of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE). Most work in the Puget Sound region of Washington state, but the union also represents 200 employees at the Gresham plant in Oregon, as well as workers at facilities in Utah and California. They bargain contracts at the same time, but the contracts are separate and independent agreements.

Both units overwhelmingly rejected Boeing's first contract offer in October 2012. The company proposed a small increase in wages, and called for an increase in members' contributions to health insurance costs.

A key sticking point was Boeing's demand to switch new hires to a defined contribution pension plan, i.e., a 401(k). Union officials say the new retirement plan slashes benefits by 41 percent. Boeing's own analysis shows a 33 percent cut.

Induced by the overwhelming rejection of its first proposal in October, Boeing agreed to extend the terms of the previous contract by including 5 percent annual salary increase pools, no increases to employees for medical coverage, and an increase to the retirement benefit. But it refused to budge on the pension change for workers hired after March 1, 2013.

With Boeing announcing its last best and final offer, the union took the proposal to members for a vote in February, with the recommendation that they reject them and support strike authorization.

On Feb. 19, the Technical Unit — made up of designers, technical writers, planners and others — rejected the offer 2,868 to 3,203 and gave strike authori-

zation. However, the larger Professional Unit, comprised of aerospace and electrical engineers, approved their contract 6,483 to 5,514.

The Technical Unit and Boeing met with a federal mediator on Feb. 27, but Boeing refused to improve its offer.

Union negotiators expressed to members that a second rejection likely would result in a strike.

On March 18, the Technical Unit accepted the deal by a margin of 87 percent to 13 percent.

Technical workers and engineers hired after March 1, 2013 will now receive the company's "enhanced 401(k)" and not the defined benefit pension.

During bargaining, SPEEA filed seven unfair labor practice (ULP)

charges against Boeing. Two complaints — one involving alleged threats made to new hires during orientation, and another on the company's code of ethics — were dismissed by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), Region 19, and are on appeal.

Charges that Boeing refused to provide the union with requested information during bargaining, and for threat-

ening layoffs if contracts weren't ratified, were sustained. The NLRB is now in settlement talks with Boeing.

Three other ULPs involving the company taking surveillance photos of employees; seizing employee cameras and photographs of union marches; and banning employees from leafleting, are still under investigation, said SPEEA Executive Director Ray Goforth.

## Strike threat becomes empty weapon for union members

*(Editor's Note: This article appeared in the Michigan's Building Tradesman newspaper.)*

U.S. union membership has been in a steep decline over the past 40 years — so have strikes and lockouts.

There were five — count 'em, five — strikes or lockouts of significance in the U.S. in 2009. That was the lowest number since the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) started keeping track in 1947. That number "spiked" to 11 in 2010 and 19 in both 2011 and 2012.

Compare that to 40 years ago, when there were an average of 289 major work stoppages a year. By the 1990s, that had fallen to about 35 per year. A major work stoppage, according to the BLS, involves 1,000 or more workers.

"The strike has almost disappeared from American life," wrote Chris Rhomberg, an associate professor of so-

ciology for Fordham University, for a CNN article. Judicial philosophies and politics have turned against unions. "We have essentially gone back to a pre-New Deal era of workplace governance."

"Before the 1930s," Rhomberg continued, "American unions confronted a legal environment that historians have described as 'judicial repression.' During that time, federal courts repeatedly struck down workers' rights to organize and act collectively, making unions themselves all but illegal."

"In 1935, the National Labor Relations Act created a process for legally recognizing union representation and managing private-sector labor conflict. The result was historic democratization of the American workplace and economy. The strike was a crucial part of this system: While the law was intended to reduce industrial strife, it also

relied on the right to strike to protect the integrity of the bargaining process."

With weaker unions, that ability to effectively strike — and raise workers' living standards — has been diminished.

### 19 strikes in 2012

In 2012, there were 19 major strikes and lockouts involving 1,000 or more workers and lasting at least one shift, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported. The work stoppages idled 148,000 workers, higher than in 2011, when 19 strikes idled 113,000 workers. Over 40 percent (8 of 19) of the work stoppages occurred in November and December.

The largest work stoppage in 2012 in terms of number of workers and total days idle was between the Chicago

Public Schools and the Chicago Teachers Union, with 26,500 workers accounting for 185,500 days idle. The longest work stoppage was between Lockheed Martin Corporation and the International Association of Machinists Local 776, with 3,600 workers accounting for 172,800 days idle. The Lockheed Martin Corporation work stoppage lasted 48 workdays.

The major work stoppage between the American Crystal Sugar Company and the Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers resulted in 308,100 days idle in 2012, and nearly 445,000 cumulative days idle since beginning on Aug. 1, 2011. The number of workers involved in the work stoppage fell below 1,000 workers in December 2012 and will no longer be counted in major work stoppage estimates.



(International Standard Serial Number 0894-444X)  
Established in 1900 at Portland, Oregon  
as a voice of the labor movement.

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Portland, Ore. 97213  
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Published on a semi-monthly basis on the first and third Fridays of each month by the Oregon Labor Press Publishing Co., Inc., a non-profit corporation owned by 20 unions and councils including the Oregon AFL-CIO. Serving more than 120 union organizations in Oregon and SW Washington. Subscriptions \$13.75 per year for union members.

Group rates available to trade union organizations.

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