

Boeing Faces Another Machinists Strike

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Just days after a monthlong walkout ended at its California C-17 plant, Boeing Co. is facing another possible strike.

The plane maker's machinists union in St. Louis has voted to reject a company offer that would have replaced a contract that expires Sunday. The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers said on its website Sunday that members voted 1548-532 to reject the offer, and voted 1619-459 to strike.

The union said it will ask Boeing to return to the table to address the issues. Union spokesman Tom Pinski said that if the strike does go forward, the earliest the walkout would start would be June 23.

"It is the intent... to have Boeing come back to the table to work through the issues our members have with the just rejected offer and not have a work stoppage," Pinski said in a e-mailed statement. Pinski noted that Boeing could refuse to resume talks at which time the union would issue the required seven-day intent to strike. He added that the union is willing to wait until Wednesday for Boeing to inform them of its intentions.

"We are disappointed the membership of IAM 837 has rejected our contract proposal and has decided to strike," Boeing spokesman Paul Guse said Sunday. "The fair and equitable contract we put forward recognizes the contributions made by our union employees in terms of enhanced salary, benefits and pension."

Boeing's four-and-a-half year proposal included a \$5,000 lump-sum payment and 3 percent raises in future years, but also would increase health care costs for workers.

Pinski said Friday the biggest problem with the Boeing offer is that workers hired after January 2012 would be in a retirement plan based on company contributions instead of a traditional pension.

"The increased health care cost would make a wash of any general wage increases that they would get," he said.

The current contract covers 2,533 Boeing workers, most of them in St. Louis, as well as operations in Maryland and other locations. Last month they authorized a strike if no new contract is reached. The workers make the FA-18 Super Hornet fighter jet, EA-18G Growler electronic attack aircraft and the F-15 Strike Eagle ground attack strike fighter as well as parts for the C-17 Air Force cargo plane that is assembled at Boeing's Long Beach, Calif., plant.

Boeing endured an eight-week strike in late 2008 that shut down commercial airplane production and was a factor in delays for its new 787 and a new version of

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its 747. That Machinists union walkout covered some 27,000 Boeing employees in Washington state, Oregon and Kansas.

Last Thursday, Boeing workers at the C-17 Long Beach plant returned to work after a strike that shut down production of the military cargo jets in a stalemate over benefits. Union members voted to accept a nearly five-year contract that was reached after federal mediators stepped into the standoff. The new deal extends Boeing's last proposal by one year and reduces employee health care contributions from the previous offer, which caused nearly all 1,700 unionized workers to walk out May 11.

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