

# Rights Worth Fighting For

The recently approved collective bargaining agreement between Machinists and the Boeing Company in St. Louis is just one of nearly 4,500 IAM contracts that are regularly renewed under U.S. labor laws. It stands out, however, as an example of how this country's defense workers can and should bargain aggressively for better wages and working conditions in the midst of large-scale military operations overseas.

The pursuit of labor's fair share is not at odds with the pursuit of national security. The fight for a better way of life for one's self and one's family is no less important than protecting our shores from those who would do us harm.

The highly skilled IAM members at Boeing-St. Louis build this country's most advanced fighter aircraft and munitions systems. Day after day, during war and peace, these men and women make a life and death difference for members of our armed forces. They are rightfully proud of their role.

Questions about how aggressive unions should be in the pursuit of members' interests during wartime are rarely directed toward management's side of the bargaining table. It is accepted that defense companies will prosper during times of conflict. Workers' share in that prosperity should be no less accepted.

The prospect and consequences of a strike at a major munitions facility is the inevitable touchstone for every diatribe against unions and collective bargaining during wartime. It is worth noting that more than 98 percent of all IAM agreements are resolved without any work stoppage.

Collective bargaining is a fundamental cornerstone of the democratic ideals that we strive to export to developing countries abroad. If we truly believe that freedom and democracy are worth fighting for, we can start by making sure those ideals are respected here at home.

**Have you heard?**

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