

Machinists union to resume talks with Boeing

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The union representing striking Boeing workers announced the resumption of talks with the company to a meeting of members Wednesday night in Seattle. Wednesday marked the 33rd day of the strike.

International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) negotiator Mark Blondin and District 751 President Tom Wroblewski met Wednesday afternoon with Boeing Commercial Airplane division chief executive Scott Carson, human resources vice president Doug Kight and chief negotiator Tom Easley to discuss arrangements for the talks.

A statement posted on District 751's web site says that "throughout the strike Union leaders have talked regularly with the [federal] mediator and had several conversations with Boeing." At the Wednesday meeting the IAM and Boeing agreed to resume discussions on the contract with the details to be worked out by mediators. According to officials, discussions may begin as early as this weekend.

Despite the union web site's statement that "your solidarity brought Boeing back to the bargaining table"-suggesting that the airplane manufacturer had yielded to the union- there is no indication that Boeing has backed down on any of its demands. Boeing's statement was noncommittal, "We are interested in exploring if there is a path forward to resolve the strike," Kight said.

Over 27,000 machinists in three states, Washington, Oregon and Kansas, have been on strike since September 6 to stop the outsourcing of their jobs, the imposition of higher costs for health care, and to improve their pension fund and wages. Workers voted to strike September 3 by an overwhelming 87 percent.

As to who actually "blinked first" in the strike, the response of IAM rep Blondin to a memo sent out to salaried employees by Boeing CEO and Chairman Jim McNerney on Monday suggests that it was the IAM

leadership.

In his memo, McNerney, cited competition from Airbus and the development of new jet manufacturers in Russia, Japan, Canada and Brazil. He noted that Airbus is "dramatically restructuring and cutting costs." McNerney did not point out that this restructuring and cutting involves the destruction of 10,000 jobs. Significantly, the Boeing executive also described the decline of US automakers. "Their market shares continue to fall," he noted, "and their layoffs have grown by the thousands."

How did Blondin respond? In an interview with the *Seattle Times* he said, "We're not trying to take away their decisions when it comes to this global stuff they have been doing." This is a capitulation to Boeing's outsourcing strategy as a "management rights" issue, a point McNerney asserted in a talk to the Chief Executives' Club of Boston last week.

On the other hand, Blondin draws a line when it comes to bringing nonunion workers into plants. "We are not going to allow suppliers to come in and do jobs that our members do inside those gates," he stated. Blondin does not contest Boeing's power to replace workers with cheaper labor, but he insists that in the US they must be IAM dues-paying members. This is the logic of the IAM bargaining for a return to pre-2002 contract conditions, when the union had the opportunity to bid on most of the work the company proposed to outsource. District 751's web site states: "The Union currently has the ability to compete for a very narrow scope of outsourced work, and we seek to broaden that scope."

As for Boeing's agreement to return to the negotiating table, it should be recalled that when Boeing Chief Financial Officer James Bell was asked if the strike would last a month, he stated, "I'd be pleased with that timing." Many commentators suggested that a month would allow Boeing's suppliers to catch up with

production as well as allow the problems with the production of Boeing's newest aircraft, the 787, to be worked out.



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