

In second vote, Washington Boeing technicians accept concessions contract

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Boeing's technicians voted "yes," by a margin of 86.6 percent on March 18, to approve a concessions contract worked out by the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace (SPEEA) and the airplane manufacturing giant.

The vote culminated several months of joint management-union efforts to impose major cutbacks on Boeing workers. The company's 15,500 engineers narrowly approved the contract in a first vote February 19. The result of the imposition of the contracts is the destruction of decent retirement benefits for new hires.

Boeing is one of the largest aircraft manufacturers in the world, with revenue in 2012 of \$81.7 billion. CEO James McNerney's total compensation in 2010 was \$19.7 million.

The technicians' vote was 4,244 votes for the four-year contract and 654 against, with 34 percent of workers not casting a vote. SPEEA represents 7,400 technical workers at Boeing. The new vote, coming one month after the same group of workers authorized a strike and voted "no" to the contract by 52 percent, reflects in part the technicians' understanding that the union was not going to fight on their behalf.

Prior to the second vote, SPEEA's president John McCarty, writing on the central issue of pensions, warned the technicians that, "The acceptance of the engineering contract has virtually eliminated any possibility of continuing the pension for new hires in the tech unit."

SPEEA executive director Ray Goforth, addressing members February 6, pointed out that the union's analysis placed the replacement of a defined benefit retirement (pension) plan by an "enhanced 401(k)" at a 41 percent cut, whereas Boeing's analysis was that it only represented a 33 percent loss for new hires. Then he asked members to "pick your favorite analysis or do

one of your own, it is a significant cut in the retirement compensation."

From the start, SPEEA did everything possible to drag out the negotiation process and demoralize the workers. The union began on its knees and proceeded from there. The notion of organizing a serious fight against Boeing was never for an instant on the SPEEA's agenda.

At each point in the talks, the SPEEA reiterated that a strike vote was simply a negotiating tool. When a group of workers, frustrated with the company's intransigence and the union's obvious impotence, called for a wildcat strike on December 5, the SPEEA was quick to denounce the proposed action and vowed to track down the organizers.

The work to demobilize and beat down the Boeing workers ultimately had the desired effect, from the point of view of Boeing and the SPEEA.

After the February 19 vote, in which the engineers voted for the contract, but also approved a strike, and the technicians both rejected the contract and authorized a walkout, the SPEEA worked might and main to make sure that no action would be taken. The union withdrew its previous recommendation to reject the contract prior to the March 18 re-vote.

In a March 1 letter to workers, the bargaining team from SPEEA declared, "We have extracted everything we could from the employer without a strike and we do not take the responsibility of calling a strike lightly." In a recent statement, the SPEEA commented that "the company steadfastly refused to move away from eliminating the pension for new technical workers hired after March 1, 2013."

The SPEEA's complaint that it could not do anything because Boeing management refused to give in is an expression of utter bankruptcy. What possible use is an

organization that rules out in advance a struggle against a ruthless corporate giant?

The union's unwillingness to fight on the workers' behalf was clear to many of its members, as can be seen by posts on the SPEEA's Facebook page. One reads, for example, "You are supposed to be doing what is best for us, for we have spoken with our votes and surveys. It is a shame to see that you have walked away from the fight (Boeing's contract offer) by saying you have no recommendation for the vote. Really?!?"

For the first time in more than sixty years, new Boeing hires will not have a pension. The biggest threat the employees faced, and the biggest concession Boeing demanded, was the elimination of the pension plan. From the very beginning, however, the SPEEA tried to downplay the significance of the concession, and attempted to set this historic blow against the minor improvements the company made during the negotiations.

After the February 19 vote and Boeing's refusal to back down on its concessions demands, the SPEEA issued a statement on February 27, which effectively threw in the towel. The union wrote: "While disappointing that the current offer eliminates the pension for anyone hired after March 1, 2013, accepting the company's last offer would lock-in the considerable improvements we achieved."

In their recent statement announcing the result of the March 18 vote, the SPEEA attempts to soften the blow by suggesting that "Like most new employees at Boeing, technical workers and engineers will now receive the company's 'enhanced 401(k)' and not the defined benefit pension," as though the fact that other workers at the company also have had their benefits devastated should be a consolation.

In order to combat Boeing's global strategy, workers require their own international strategy. It can do this only by taking the conduct of this struggle out of the hands of the SPEEA and organizing an independent rank-and-file struggle to unite aircraft workers in the US and internationally on a socialist program against the unrelenting assault on jobs and living standards.



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