

US aircraft manufacturer renews job threats

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Following the decisive rejection of a concessions contract by Boeing machinists in Everett, Washington, near Seattle, the company has escalated its threat to move production of the new 777x jetliner to other manufacturing facilities. The International Association of Machinists (IAM) union, meanwhile, has sought to reopen negotiations with the company in order to cobble together a deal IAM officials hope to ram through the opposition of workers.

The *Seattle Times* reported that Boeing was considering over half a dozen states to relocate production of its new composite-winged jet. It is no doubt looking to extort tax abatements similar to the \$9 billion in tax cuts, which Washington officials voted to grant the giant aerospace company through 2040.

In a statement, company officials said they were “very disappointed with the outcome of the union vote,” saying the agreement would have given the company a “competitive cost structure” for the new airliner. “But without the terms of this contract extension,” it continued, “we’re left with no choice but to open the process competitively and pursue all options for the 777X.”

Boeing Chairman and Chief Executive Jim McNerney told reporters the company expects to make a decision on where to build the new 777 within 3 months. For his part, Washington Governor Jay Inslee said the state would move ahead with its “incentive package” and that the state would remain in the competition to produce the plane.

While Boeing has officially stated that it will not attempt to renegotiate the contract, the IAM International has entered into behind-the-scenes negotiations with the company, according to one Boeing worker who spoke to the WSW.

On November 14, 31,000 machinists—members of the International Association of Machinists (IAM) District 751 in Washington and another 1,500 workers in

Portland, Oregon—voted down a six-year contract extension that would have slashed workers’ wages and benefits in exchange for supposed promises that the company would produce the 777x in Everett.

The deal would have extended the current contract, due to expire in 2016, until 2024. It would have ended company-paid pensions—replacing them with 401(K) employee contribution plans—sharply increased out-of-pocket medical costs and curtailed health coverage. Wages would be effectively frozen, while already low-paid new-hires would have had to labor for sixteen years before reaching the top pay scale.

Boeing manufactures the current generation of the 777 in its Everett facility near Seattle, but it has made clear that it is aggressively looking for alternative locations to build the aircraft, including its non-union facility in North Charleston, South Carolina.

This week Boeing received 342 orders for the 777x at the Dubai Air Show, shutting out its European rival, Airbus. The orders netted the company some \$100 billion in revenue in the largest jetliner launch in history.

It is clear that Boeing wants a “competitive cost structure” without employer-paid pensions so that a far larger portion of those revenues will go straight into corporate and investor profit rather than pensions and other post-retirement benefits.

Responding to the company’s record orders, IAM District 751 issued a statement saying, “We congratulate Boeing on the record 777X orders at the Dubai Air Show. We’ve always believed that the best thing for Boeing’s customers and shareholders is for our union members to build those planes here in Puget Sound, and we still believe that.”

Reeling from the no vote, the IAM has launched a public campaign urging Boeing to reconsider its plans to move production out of the state. Their goal is to revive the campaign by the company, the union and

Democratic Party politicians against the workers, in order to wear down their opposition to new concession demands.

“They’re trying to hold our feet to the fire,” said one Everett Boeing worker, who said he been through similar experiences with the UAW as an autoworker in Detroit. “They’re thinking, ‘what would it take to get this punched through?’”

“The IAM is a corporation all to themselves,” he said, adding that the union did not express the interests of rank-and-file workers. “They want to make sure they produce the 777X here because they want the dues money. Just think about it: sixty-seven dollars per month for 10,000 workers,” he said. At that rate, the union would be losing over \$8 million per year in dues.

The IAM called a “Build it here” rally Tuesday in small downtown Seattle plaza. No more than 200 people attended the event, which could not attract any significant number of workers. Well aware of the deep anger of workers, state AFL-CIO officials and some local officials hailed the workers’ vote even though they are all committed to imposing deep concessions on the Boeing workers.

Above all the rally was aimed at reviving the cementing the alliance of the company, the IAM and local and state politicians against the workers in an effort to soften them up for future concession demands.

“We gather today to say we want to build the 777x in Washington state, we can build the 777x in Washington state, and we should build the 777x in Washington state,” said Jeff Johnson, [president of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO].

Robert Stern, the former Lead Lobbyist for the Washington branch of the AFL-CIO, added, “We want the 777X built in Washington and we hope that Boeing corporate management will come to their senses and engage in genuine collective bargaining with the Machinists.”

Sharing the platform with the union bureaucrats was Kshama Sawant, a member of Socialist Alternative, who was recently elected to the Seattle City Council. She made demagogic remarks, saying, “The only response we can have if Boeing executives do not agree to keep the plant here is for the machinists to say the machines are here, the workers are here, we will do the job.”

However, her attendance at the rally—under conditions

of a virtual rebellion against the IAM by its members—underscores her solidarity, not with rank-and-file workers, but the gang up of the IAM, the company and the Democratic Party against Boeing workers.

In the aftermath of the vote, no confidence votes have been passed by two of four IAM units in District 751 against district President Tom Wroblewski, along with calls for his resignation.

“Everyone is extremely upset at the union for even daring to bring this contract to us,” said one worker. “We knew nothing until it hit the news: the union continuously blind-sides the rank-and-file. Everything they do, they ram-rod it.

“You’d have to be an absolute zealot to really believe that the union is there for you as a worker,” the worker told the WSWS, “They’re working for the company lock, stock and barrel.”



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