

Union, politicians press Boeing workers for revote on rejected contract extension

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Efforts by the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) to reach a new concessions agreement with Boeing have temporarily broken down after executives of the giant airplane manufacturer demanded that the IAM bring back essentially the same contract extension that was overwhelmingly voted down by rank-and-file workers last month. The collapse of negotiations has been followed by a campaign by Washington State politicians and the media demanding that the IAM force workers to revote on the deal.

In mid-November workers defied threats by Boeing, the IAM and state officials that production of the new 777X jetliner would be moved to a lower cost facility. By a two-to-one margin they voted down an eight-year extension that would have replaced a company-paid pension with a 401(k) employee contribution plan, sharply increased health care costs, frozen wages and extended the period low-paid workers had to labor before reaching top pay. The rebellion by workers against the deal—which also included an 11-year strike ban—came after decades of so-called “job saving” concession contracts, which have done nothing to stop outsourcing.

The IAM has attempted to revive negotiations through behind-the-scenes talks and a public relations campaign, which has included a “Build It Here” rally addressed by AFL-CIO and IAM officials, local Democratic Party leaders and Socialist Alternative member and newly elected Seattle City Council member Kshama Sawant.

The talks apparently collapsed Thursday after Boeing negotiators made clear they were not budging from their original concessions demands. Since then politicians from both big business parties at the national, state and local levels have made it clear they

consider the vote by workers illegitimate.

According to the AP, “State Senate Majority Leader Rodney Tom, a Democrat, and Senate Republican Leader Mark Schoesler sent a joint letter Friday to a local union leader, urging a vote.” Democratic Governor Jay Inslee, whose election campaign was supported by the IAM, stated, “That should happen soon, as I have become increasingly concerned that we are at a perilous point in our effort to bring the 777X to Washington state.”

IAM Communications Director Frank Larkin stated, “The logistics of a vote are under consideration right now.” he continued, “Members have always had the last word on contracts. That’s not about to change.”

Multiple votes on slightly altered proposals have become the norm of the unions, which insist that workers vote until they “get it right.”

“This is being pushed by the International,” said Everett Boeing worker Doug. “The IAM is trying to protect their assets which is us and our dues. They’re going to get the concessions—they want those pensions gone, if not now, then in 2016 [when the current contract ends].”

Doug, who is a veteran of the 2008 American Axle strike, which was sold out by the United Auto Workers in Detroit, said, workers in IAM 751 rejected the deal out of hand. “The sad part is we don’t find out anything until we hear it in the morning news.”

After three days of meetings, which began December 10, IAM District 751 President Tom Wroblewski, stated, “[T]he price Boeing demanded was too high.” According to District 751’s web site, Boeing was still “demanding steep concessions in retirement and health benefits while limiting future pay increases.”

Wroblewski has no principled opposition to the concessions and only fears he cannot get away with

pushing the deal past workers. He and other IAM officials endorsed the first contract and tried to ram it through by echoing Boeing's threats to workers' jobs. It was only when he was faced with the anger of rank-and-file workers that Wroblewski suddenly denounced his own proposal as a "piece of crap." He then proceeded to tell workers the fate of their families depended on voting for it.

Such was the hostility of workers—displayed in lunchtime demonstrations on the Everett plant floor and postings on the district's Facebook site condemning the union leadership and the union—that a section of local leaders called for a 'no' vote on the contract.

The presence of several of these so-called dissidents at the initial December 10 "Feedback Session" with Boeing Commercial Airplanes CEO Ray Conner and District 751 leadership shows how quickly these loyal oppositionists have been brought on board for another concessions deal.

These elements have no political differences with Wroblewski and the IAM International. They are all tied to the Democratic Party, defend the profit system and insist that workers accept whatever demands are necessary to make American capitalism "competitive" in the global economy. Along with pseudo-left tendencies, such as Labor Notes, Socialist Alternative and the International Socialist Organization, the dissidents insisted that the IAM could, under pressure from below, be forced to lead a struggle to defend workers' jobs and living standards.

This is a fraud. The degeneration of the IAM and all of the unions—in the US and internationally—is not the product simply of the corruption and cowardice of this or that union executive. Instead, the treachery of the union officials is the expression of the failure and collapse of all nationally based labor organizations in the face of the globalization of capitalist production, and the transformation of the unions throughout the world into direct instruments of corporate management and the state.

The participation of the so-called dissidents in a discussion with top Boeing management is ultimately aimed at assessing what level of concessions might be "acceptable" to the rank-and-file. As soon as that is determined they will all join the campaign to demand another vote.

After November's rejection by workers, Boeing

escalated its threat to move production out of the Puget Sound area. Expressing disappointment with the defeat of the agreement, which top management said, would have given the company a "competitive cost structure" for the new airplane, company officials said, "We're left with no choice but to open the process competitively and pursue all options for the 777X."

The decision on where to produce the new carbon composite-winged jet, has been used by the largest airplane manufacturer in the world to extort not only deep-going concessions from its workers but also huge tax cuts from Washington. A special legislative session at the beginning of November called by Governor Inslee passed the largest tax decrease ever granted to a US corporation. Politicians voted to hand the company eleven different tax cuts—for a total of \$8.7 billion—until at least 2040, all in the name of "keeping jobs in Washington."

In Missouri, Democratic Governor Jay Nixon, with the collaboration of the unions, has sought to lure Boeing by committing to build a facility, which would operate on a 24-hour schedule without overtime pay. This is in addition to offering tax breaks of \$1.7 billion over 23 years.

In 2003 Washington passed a broad package of tax breaks in order to keep the manufacture of Boeing's newest plane, the 787 Dreamliner, in the state. However, Boeing proceeded to establish a 787 production line in South Carolina and build its wings in Japan.

The defense of jobs can only be conducted on the basis of an international struggle against the profit system and the unions and big business parties that defend it. For this workers need new organizations of struggle and a new socialist, political strategy.



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