

Machinists' union rams through sellout deal at Boeing

Shannon Jones
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An eight-year contract extension at Boeing was narrowly pushed through Friday after officials from the International Association of Machinists (IAM) forced a new vote on essentially the same deal rank-and-file workers rejected by a two-to-one margin in November. The IAM claimed 51 percent of the workers voting on the sellout agreement ratified it.

The deal—which extends the current contract from 2016 to 2024—eliminates company-paid pensions, imposes higher healthcare costs in accordance with Obama's health care law and reduces wage increases. It also bars strikes through the expiration of the contract.

The vote tally was greeted in the Everett, Washington union hall with shock, anger and accusations of vote rigging.

After the first vote, Boeing workers were subjected to a nonstop barrage by the union, the corporate media and the Washington state political establishment demanding they submit to economic blackmail by the giant airline manufacturer. Boeing threatened to move construction of its 777X jetliner out of the Seattle area to a low wage state if the contract was defeated. Corporate executives claimed they received bids from 22 states for 54 possible locations.

The IAM International scheduled the vote during the holidays to assure that workers had as little time as possible to study details of the contract and organize opposition. At the same time the IAM hoped that the addition of an additional \$5,000 lump sum bonus to be given to each member in 2020 on top of a previously offered \$10,000 bonus in 2016 would secure enough 'yes' votes to obtain ratification.

The widespread opposition to the sellout comes as Boeing announced its biggest cash payout in history, with plans to implement a \$10 billion stock buyback and increase its quarterly dividend by 50 percent. The

company is expected to announce record profits for its commercial unit in 2013.

In the run-up to the vote workers were subjected to propaganda from the media denouncing opposition to the concessions. Typical were the comments of the *Seattle Times*, which declared that Boeing workers "must hunker down and compromise for the future."

The IAM joined this blackmail, saying that "the timeline for the Puget Sound area is expiring" and warning of "economic destruction" if the concessions were not ratified.

While several leaders of IAM District 751 criticized the international's decision to hold a revote, they advanced no strategy to oppose Boeing's threat to relocate production and wipe out tens of thousands of jobs. Officials such as District 751 President Tom Wroblewski—who supported the deal until he confronted mass opposition—accept without question the right of Boeing's billionaire stockholders and executives to own and control vast productive forces built up on the labor of generations of workers.

Knowing full well that the local officials would not lead any fight against the company and the IAM International, many workers reluctantly voted for the deal.

One Everett, Washington Boeing worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "It's the same deal as before. It's a bunch of hooey. Even if they build the body here the building of the wings are in question. It is like Boeing is pulling a fast one." Remarking on the role of the IAM, he said, "Everyone is very pissed off about it. It is like collusion. I think there is going to be serious blowback with the union over this. The union really is tied in with Corporate America."

Another Boeing worker, commenting on the *Seattle Times* blog, explained why he changed his vote from

“yes” to “no”. “I voted yes the first time and voted no this time. Boeing is getting the largest tax break in history. They don’t need corporate welfare, to give executives huge raises, while cutting my measly pay. Between taxes, healthcare, food, gas, rent, etc., my family is still not doing great. Why should we take a cut so the board approves bonuses for themselves?”

A WSWS reporter spoke to several workers voting at the District 751 hall in Everett. Roger Hendrix said, “The contract language is quite vague. If you are buying a car, you should have a contract that is clear, otherwise you won’t buy it. This contract doesn’t tie Boeing down much—they can still get the work done elsewhere.

“They are using the money they have to buy back stock—not to give us anything. This contract has health care cuts of 16 percent. And to get the \$5,000, you have to be in the payroll in 2020! The way the layoffs work in this industry, who can be sure?”

Another Boeing worker, Tyler Ackley, said, “This is mostly about taking away our pensions. We are not given much information. I feel the union sees a lot of information behind closed doors.”

Another worker, Ray, added, “I feel the local media is in Boeing’s pocket. The reporting I find there is unbalanced. This contract is really no different than the last one. Boeing has record profits. The backlog of planes is high, and the stock price is high. But we can’t have our pension. And the local is not really supporting us—they are scared. If we are to succeed in this, we need a strong representation.”

Boeing workers must draw the appropriate conclusions from the role of the IAM and every other union. A struggle to defend jobs and living standards can only be waged in direct opposition to every section of the IAM, which is nothing more than an instrument of the corporations and the government.

Rank-and-file committees must be built to begin the industrial and political mobilization of the working class. This requires a new program and strategy. The right to good paying, secure jobs, decent pensions and health care are social rights that must take precedence over the profit interests of the corporate elite. The threat by Boeing to eliminate jobs must be answered by the nationalization of the aerospace industry under the democratic public ownership and control of the working class.

Workers must reject the unions’ political subordination of the working class to the Democratic Party. The working class needs an independent political party of its own, in opposition to the two parties of Wall Street. This party must fight for the reorganization of economic life in the interests of the working class, not the profit requirements of the rich. All workers interested in taking up this fight should contact the Socialist Equality Party.



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