

Boeing workers denounce union for ramming through sellout deal

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Boeing workers angrily denounced the International Association of Machinists (IAM) for ramming through a second vote on an eight-year contract extension, which granted sweeping concessions to the airplane manufacturing giant. With nearly 25,000 members voting, the IAM claimed the deal was approved by 51 to 49 percent and was passed by only 600 votes.

The contract is in all essentials identical to the one rank-and-file workers rejected by a 2 to 1 margin last November. In line with the virtual elimination of pensions throughout major industries, Boeing's company-paid defined-contribution pension will be replaced with a 401K, while current pensions are frozen. The deal will also allow the companies to impose higher health-care costs and reduce benefits in line with the Obama administration's health care law. Finally, wages increases will be limited to one percent every other year and workers will be barred from striking until 2024.

The deal throws Boeing workers back decades. Boeing workers first won the right to company-paid pensions in 1947. This follows a pattern throughout industry where the percentage of private sector workers covered by such pensions has fallen from 60 percent in the 1980s to around nine percent today.

Calls for a recount have been ignored by the IAM, which has released no additional information on the vote since Friday. Comments by machinists on a Facebook page not affiliated with the union have been scathing with accusations of fraud. IAM Local District 751, which had thousands of postings condemning the first vote, has since disabled the comments section of its Facebook page.

Workers also denounced the IAM for holding the vote during the holiday when many workers were still out of town. Richard Bohot posted that, "I have been through 2 strikes myself. I would like at least a recount or revote this week. With our international allowing neither and a 51-49 it reeks of corruption. They have divided this

workforce."

John Scofield wrote, "Yea wave the democratic flag when u won't even let us do a recount when it passes by a [few] hundred votes! wave the democratic flag when u schedule a vote when thousands are on scheduled vacation! Wave the democratic flag when u use eligibility cards to get [a] ballot but don't send them to over 50 percent of the folks who were in town so they have to spend up to 3 hours in line for a ballot to which 100s just gave up and went home or back to work."

Everett machinist Doug told the WSWs, "The contract language is zero guarantee for jobs; the only guarantee is for no strike. The letter of understanding to build the plane in Washington is not legally binding."

The IAM joined the gang-up of corporate executives and state and local politicians, including Washington's Democratic Governor Jay Inslee, who sought to use economic blackmail against workers. Boeing had threatened to pull construction of the latest version of its 777 jet out of the Puget Sound-area if machinists refused to accept these concessions. Boeing executives claimed 22 states were vying for the opportunity to build the plane and its advanced composite wings with offers of tax abatement and lower-wages. Despite this workers overwhelmingly defeated the deal.

The IAM International ignored the November vote and conspired with the company and state and local Democrats to ram through another vote. In the face of deep opposition, several local union officials, including District 751 President Tom Wroblewski, who supported the original deal changed their tune, criticized the International and called for a 'no' vote. But it was clear that the local officials had no answer to the company's threats to shift production and destroy thousands of jobs. Under these conditions, large numbers of workers reluctantly voted for the deal.

Boeing is raking in record profits, saw its share value

rise nearly 80 percent in 2013, and has just carried out a multi-billion stock buyback to boost the fortunes of its richest investors. Within days of the vote it announced a deal to sell Air Algerie eight 737-800 commercial planes worth \$724 million.

Dismissing the loss of pensions, IAM Vice-President Rich Michalski claimed the IAM had “maximized our job security.” He added, “It’s all about being able to compete with the rest of the world.”

The pro-capitalist and nationalist outlook of the IAM has only led to a race to the bottom for aerospace workers. Far from securing jobs and living standards, the IAM sellout opens the door for even more rapacious demands by Boeing. University of Puget Sound sociology professor Leon Grunberg noted that if the machinists “with a company as successful as Boeing has to agree to give up these things they’ve won, the trend will definitely continue.”

A January 5 article, entitled, “Boeing’s billion dollar threat pays off,” on the investor site *The Motley Fool*, celebrates the ending of secure retirement for aerospace workers. Gleefully beginning with the statement, “Great News!” writer Katie Spence describes the contract as representing, “...a significant cost-savings win for the company.” Getting to the rationale for Boeing’s assault on its work force, she says, “Therefore, if you’re a Boeing investor, the contract agreement between Boeing and the Machinists union is good news.”

A January 3 article in *Leedham News and Comments*, published by aerospace consultant Leedham Co., stated, “But make no mistake: when Boeing proceeds with a new airplane design to replace the 757, followed by one to replace the 737, we’re going to see another round of efforts to browbeat the union and the state into more concessions or give-backs in exchange for production to be located here.”

In an article in the *Seattle Times*, Leedham’s Scott Hamilton is quoted saying, “There is no guarantee that the next new airplane will be built here.”

Both Grunberg and Hamilton agreed that the Boeing’s professional and technical workers would be targeted next. “SPEEA [Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace] will be in the fat bull’s-eye next,” said Hamilton. Last March SPEEA forced through a contract that gave up defined pensions for new hires.

In the aftermath of the vote, Wroblewski and the rest of the loyal oppositionists in the local have basically folded up their tents and called for unity with the IAM International. Don Ferguson, president of Local A, said,

“We are a family. Families have differences.” He called on workers to “put this vote behind us and go forward in solidarity,” adding, “There is a lot of talk of pulling out of the International, that is a self defeating proposition.”

Behind these “dissidents” stand a motley crew of pseudo-left organizations such as the International Socialist Organization, Labor Notes and Socialist Alternative who seek to maintain the hold of the increasingly discredited unions over the working class.

Oozing with upper middle class complacency, ISO writer Darren Hoop claims Boeing’s threat to move production out of Washington State was hollow. Citing industry analysts on the advantages of Boeing staying in Washington, Hoop states that, “Boeing would be better off to keep production of the 777X in Puget Sound, with or without union concessions.”

In fact the bitter experiences of the working class show how real such threats are. Since the 1980s the jobs and lives of hundreds of thousands autoworkers, steel workers and many other sections of the working class have been shattered as factories and entire industries have closed their doors and shifted production to lower cost areas and countries.

By denying this obvious truth the ISO is seeking to block workers from drawing the necessary political conclusions and breaking with the pro-capitalist trade unions and Democratic Party. The struggle to oppose concessions *and* defend jobs requires the political mobilization of the working class based on a socialist program that challenges the private ownership of the mass industries. The only answer to the corporate threat to shift production is the nationalization Boeing and the entire aerospace industry under workers’ control.



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