

Truckers for Boeing in Washington State vote unanimously to strike, while Boeing executives rake in bonuses

David Fitzgerald
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Two hundred and twenty Boeing workers, part of Teamsters Local 174, voted unanimously on April 11 to authorize a strike in Washington State if a new contract agreement cannot be reached by April 17. These workers are responsible for transporting dangerous equipment such as aircraft engines, fuselages, other aircraft parts, as well as driving tankers across many miles and fueling and de-fueling aircraft.

One worker told local Seattle station King5 that “everyday [the work] varies. Everyday you don’t know what you’re going to do.” He continued, “We move everything,” referring to the fact that almost every part of a plane has to be transported throughout Western Washington.

Another worker said, “[Boeing’s executives] came in demanding a concessionary contract while at the same time giving themselves bonuses and that just ...We’re not going to stand for that kind of inequity.” Another worker made it clear that “we’re not going to get pushed around just because we’re the little guys.”

Boeing workers have had to endure backbreaking work schedules for years. The crashes of two Boeing 737 Max 8 aircraft, resulting in the deaths of 346 people in 2019, was directly tied to what Ed Pierson, the director of the Max 8 project, called a “dogmatic focus on schedule.” The company had demanded that production of planes jump from 47 to 52 a month despite the “product and worker-safety risks.” Pierson had emphasized the lack of skilled mechanics, electricians and technicians. The overtime hours also doubled, endangering and fatiguing workers.

The main grievance of the workers is the steady erosion of their living standards by a skyrocketing cost of living. The average salary of a Boeing delivery

driver is \$50,000, while the median cost of a home in Seattle (where Boeing is headquartered) is \$714,400. From 2018-19 housing accounted for 36 percent of the area’s household budget, and the average housing expenditure was \$29,234. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that, in the US, grocery prices have increased by an average of 3.5 percent compared to last year. This has resulted in an average increase of \$500 per year for groceries.

Boeing has also downsized its production capacity in Washington, moving all of its facilities to make the 787 Dreamliner aircraft from Everett Washington to North Carolina, to reduce labor costs.

At the other pole, Boeing executives, none of whom have been held criminally responsible for their role in the Max 8 deaths, have seen their compensation climb. In a year when the company laid off at least 30,000 workers, CEO David Calhoun made more than \$20 million in pay and stock options. Boeing received \$17 billion through the CARES Act, a multi-trillion dollar corporate bailout during the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic in the United States.

Meanwhile, the pandemic has had a devastating impact on Washington State workers. There have been more than 380,000 cases in the state and more than 5,400 deaths. Daily new cases are again rising in the state and currently stand at nearly 1,200 a day, with a daily average of seven deaths.

Unemployment claims have risen 128 percent since February 2020, according to the Washington State Employment Security Department. Another 17,281 workers applied for unemployment claims from April 4-10 of this year, and the average minimum wage remains at an unlivable \$13.50 per hour. The

Employment Security Department said on March 4 that up to 55,000 people may have to pay back a substantial amount of the jobless benefits they had received.

None of these conditions have been addressed by the Teamsters in their call for a strike vote. The union does not make a single concrete demand in their public statement, instead saying only that they are “confident our members will give this bargaining committee the tools we need to convince their company to change course.”

Such empty phrases are a clear signal that the union will do nothing to fight for increased standards of living for those it claims to represent. Teamsters union locals have rushed through countless sellout deals, including the shutdown of the strike by 1,400 Hunts Point produce workers this January in New York City, worked out in close collaboration with the Democratic Party.

The workers were not able to see the exact terms of the deal until after negotiations with management had concluded. Not one demand of the striking workers was met, including safe conditions during the pandemic, the elimination of the hated two-tier wage structure—which was pushed through by the Teamsters in 2009—and a living wage. Instead, workers were given a paltry 40 cent per hour wage increase and a one-time holiday bonus of \$1,300.

This is not because of a lack of resources; the Teamsters union controls over \$502 million in assets. The union is not concerned with “convincing” Boeing “to change course,” but in ensuring that they are still able to collect dues from the 220 workers who voted to strike after negotiations with Boeing are complete.

The Teamsters are doing everything possible to isolate and contain the strike. Local 174 itself represents workers in 16 industries in the Seattle area, but none of them have been called upon to unite with Boeing workers.

The leadership of the struggle at Boeing must be taken out of the hands of the Teamsters bureaucracy and placed under the control of the rank-and-file themselves. The broadest possible appeal must be made to the rest of Boeing’s workforce, as well as workers in other industries, to demand living wages, safe working conditions for essential workers, the shutdown of schools and nonessential businesses to contain and eradicate the pandemic, and full compensation for

workers and small businesses.



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