

International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers reaches tentative agreement with Alaska Airlines

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On June 22, the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) reached a tentative agreement for a contract extension with Alaska Airlines which would cover approximately 5,300 Alaska Airlines workers who work in ramp, stores, clerical, office and passenger service in the airline's six hubs at Anchorage, Alaska; SeaTac, Washington; Portland, Oregon; San Francisco, California; and Los Angeles, California.

The tentative agreement extends the current contract two more years beyond the slated 2024 expiration, making the new proposed expiration date September 27, 2026. The proposal would raise base wages at a rate between 8.9 percent and 17.4 percent on August 10. This amounts to an approximately \$1 to \$6 higher hourly rate depending on the job classification. Miniscule 2.5 percent raises would be issued every year for the next three years starting August 10, 2023.

In 2024 and 2025, the tentative agreement calls for an "industry review" which will give workers the 2.5 percent raise or the percentage required to match the top of the scale as the No. 4 airline in the industry, whichever is greater. This pathetic "concession" is made with awareness of the insubstantial raises it would generate in either case, pay increases far below the current 8.6 percent inflation rate that would amount to a huge effective cut in wages.

Further, inflation rates in the high cost cities that Alaska Airlines uses as its hubs stand at around 10.5 percent. These paltry raises do not nearly keep up with the cost of living. Even the maximum raise of 17.4 percent in August 2022 would not make up for years of stagnated wages.

Additional token raises listed in the highlights called

"longevity increases" will do little to change the picture. They will increase workers' hourly wages by a mere 5 cents after 6 years, 10 cents after 7 years, 15 cents after 8 years, 20 cents after 9 years, 25 cents after 10 years, 30 cents after 11 years, and 35 cents for every year after that.

The tentative agreement reportedly made no changes to existing medical and other benefits.

The IAM has a history of betraying airline workers. In 2018, unionized baggage handlers employed by McGee Air Services and cargo ramp workers employed directly by Alaska Airlines were discovered to be working for less than the minimum wage. These workers do their jobs under grueling conditions, frequently during adverse weather. In addition, the airline guarantees that passengers' bags will arrive at luggage carousels within 20 minutes of landing, which creates burdensome speedup conditions for workers.

Alaska Airlines has been able to rely on the IAM for its corporatist support to superexploit these workers by outsourcing these jobs to vendors that are exempt from local minimum wage laws. These vendors are often exempted from local laws by regulatory provisions that permit airports like SeaTac to operate with a measure of autonomy not subject to local legislative interference.

During negotiations for the 2005 contract, Alaska Airlines outsourced baggage handling to Menzies Aviation, a non-union vendor, with no objection from the IAM. Baggage handlers immediately saw their wages slashed by 40 percent.

After a long court battle over workers' stolen wages under Menzies Aviation that did not see workers recover their pay until 2017, the baggage handling

contract was restored to McGee Air Services. Alaska Airlines was still permitted to pay baggage handlers less than the minimum wage due to provisions in the contract with the IAM that gave the company the exemption in return for restoring the contract with unionized McGee Air Services. This cynical and cutthroat deal sold out contract workers to acquire additional dues revenue for the union bureaucracy. IAM Assistant Airline Coordinator James Carlson reported that the union had “formed a very collaborative relationship with the leadership of McGee. They seem like a good bunch of people that care about their workers.”

The IAM betrayals stretch back to 2005, when it ordered its members to cross picket lines during the strike by members of the Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association (AMFA) at Northwest Airlines. Fellow AFL-CIO member unions, the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA) and the Professional Flight Attendants Association (PFAA), also continued to work during the strike, resulting in the defeat of the strike and the destruction of the union. Not only that, the IAM sought to directly profit off its scabbing operation by grabbing some of the Northwest mechanics’ jobs.

The 2005 AMFA strike at Northwest Airlines was about more than just money to the airlines. The airlines wanted to outsource as many jobs as possible to save on payroll and crush the militant workers fighting for a better living. The airlines had the acquiescence of the AFL-CIO and the backing of the state, including the Democratic Party, which had nothing to say about the trampling of workers’ rights. Northwest Airlines knew that if it did not get the cuts it wanted that the company could declare bankruptcy and have the cuts enforced by the courts anyway.

The working class has a wide array of enemies it confronts, some openly and others like the trade unions which are prepared to stab them in the back for the selfish interests of a corrupt and depraved bureaucracy. It is clear that the only way for workers to fight and win is to form independent workers’ organizations outside of the pro-company and nationalist trade unions. For this, Alaska Air workers should follow the example of autoworkers, educators and health care workers by building rank-and-file committees, democratically run by workers themselves.

In order to link the growing network of rank-and-file

committees across crafts, companies, industries and continents, workers need the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) launched last year by the WSWs and the International Committee of the Fourth International to unite workers in a globally coordinated fight against the airlines and other transnational corporations.

For more information about forming a rank-and-file committee at your workplace, contact the *World Socialist Web Site* today.



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