"Our union is selling us out"

Workers furious after IAM announces sellout contract at Boeing

Bryan Dyne
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Build a movement to reject this sellout and impose the will of the membership! Contact the WSWS today for information about building a rank-and-file committee at Boeing.

Workers reacted angrily on Sunday when the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) announced a tentative agreement for 33,000 Boeing workers in the Seattle area and Pacific Northwest. The contract, with workers allowed only four days to review before voting on, is aimed at blocking a strike for which workers voted 99.9 percent to authorize in a mass meeting this July.

IAM District Lodge 751 calls the tentative agreement "the best contract we've negotiated in our history" and that it is recommending a "yes" vote. But in reality it imposes the costs of the company's massive ongoing crisis over cost-cutting to basic safety and quality assurance procedures, which have led to two mass-fatality accidents and many more dangerous incidents on the company's 737-MAX aircraft.

Major features of the deal include:

•Wage increases of only 25 percent, spread out over 4 years, far below the 40 percent which officials claimed was the bare minimum. Given the fact that workers have not had a wage increase since 2014, when the IAM narrowly pushed through a 10-year extension under dubious circumstances, this will leave workers making less than they did a decade ago.

One worker wrote on social media, "If you live anywhere near Puget Sound you'll note costs of things especially rent, has went up in all areas, avg for a studio apartment or 1 [bedroom] is at least $1300. I've been here roughly 15 years, my first 1 [bedroom] apartment was $625, by comparison."

•The deal also contains a worthless promise that the company will produce any new models of commercial airplanes at the unionized Everett, Washington facility, rather than its nonunion plant in South Carolina. This is meaningless, given that no such aircraft will enter production under the life of the contract.

• The contract eliminates the AMPP (Aerospace Machinists Performance Program) yearly bonus which has averaged a 3.7 percent bonus for the past several years and is based on "improvements in productivity, quality and safety." It is often crucial to the livelihoods for many workers, especially as it is usually paid out during tax season.

Its exclusion from the contract underscores that the contract imposes the financial cost of these safety issues on the backs of workers who have been fighting against corporate negligence for years.

• The IAM also boasted that the deal has "improved overtime limits," by reducing the number of consecutive weekends a worker can be scheduled down to one. But a new "Weekday Limit" clause allows Boeing to demand workers work two hours of overtime "on any weekday." That limit can be circumvented at any time if the company claims there are "emergent production situations" or "critical line moves," terms which are not further defined. This means that management can impose unrestricted overtime by declaring an "emergency."

Rank-and-file must mobilize

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges Boeing workers to reject this deal by the widest possible margin. Workers must organize now to impose the democratic decision made in July to strike. This means the formation of a Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee, independent of the IAM bureaucracy. This will give them the ability to prepare and carry out all decisions which workers deem necessary, overriding the opposition of pro-company union officials.

Rank-and-file committees have already been founded in recent years to fight union-backed sellouts, including among logistics workers, railroad workers, autoworkers and others.

In particular, Boeing workers must be prepared to impose rank-and-file oversight over balloting. Thursday's vote is not a fair and impartial procedure: it is a set-up. The fact that the union officials scheduled it before they even officially had an agreement proves that they never had any intention of striking and already had a deal worked out behind workers' backs.

Worse, the procedure itself, by including the arbitrary and undemocratic two-stage requirement that "ratifies" the contract unless workers also vote again to strike by a two-thirds majority, creates a loophole where the IAM officials can impose the deal even if a majority reject it.

Workers already took an important first step Sunday on the

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social media platform Reddit, when they organized an “unofficial vote.” As of this writing, 375 voted “No, strike” to only 79 voting “Yes, no strike,” an 82-18 margin.

Workers remember bitterly the experience of the 2014 contract extension vote, which narrowly passed by 51-49 amid many challenges over irregularities. “I’m terrified the ballot gets stuffed - hope there are watchers with this sell out team,” one worker said on social media. Another commented, “What kind of kickbacks are the union leadership getting to make this obscene recommendation?”

Hundreds of furious workers took to Reddit and other social media sites to oppose the deal. Other comments include:

• “Once again our union has failed us, surprised? Not at all. Voting no on offer and yes on strike!!!!” and “Spread the word! REJECT THE CONTRACT, VOTE TO STRIKE!!”

• “Going to keep voting no until Grade 1 new hires get paid enough to afford a 1 bedroom apartment, utilities, and groceries without having to work overtime.”

• “Not surprised by our joke of a union, they’ll be happy to collect more dues and not have to dip into the strike fund to pay us a weak 250$ strike check on the 3rd week.”

• “Went from so far apart in less then 24hrs the union recommends accepting. I wonder what back door deals were made.”

• “Business reps get over 150k a year and the union president gets well over 250k a year for what??”

Wave of sellouts by union bureaucrats

By taking a stand at Boeing, workers will send a message to workers everywhere that they do not have to accept poverty contracts.

Boeing is only the latest in a series of major contracts where bogus strike threats were followed by sellouts. It follows similar maneuvers by the Teamsters bureaucracy at UPS last year, as well as the United Auto Workers, which called a token strike which barely dented production.

Just as the IAM is claiming now, the bureaucrats claimed those contracts were among the best ever negotiated. But since then, thousands of UPS workers and autoworkers have lost their jobs, with many times more on the way.

This is also a serious warning to the tens of thousands of East Coast dockworkers, where the International Longshoremen’s Association has been noisily threatening a strike at the end of the month. A general rule of thumb has emerged: the bigger the talk, the bigger the sellout.

In recent years these sellouts have come with the high-level involvement of the Biden White House. The so-called “most pro-union president in American history” is really the most pro-union bureaucracy president in history, leveraging the corrupt officialdom to impose sub-inflation wages and prevent strikes.

The most infamous example of this was in 2022, when Biden and Congress banned a strike on the railroads. Now, the rail unions, including IAM District 19, are attempting to quietly ram through even more inferior new deals before the November elections.

Last week’s visit by acting Labor Secretary Julie Su, as the WSWS warned, was a sign that the IAM and Boeing were close to announcing a deal which met none of workers’ demands.

Boeing workers are in a fight not just against the company and their stooges in the IAM, but against the government. In particular, a strike at a major military contractor which would jeopardize both the wars already in motion and those planned for after the election cannot be allowed.

Workers can fight back only by appealing for the broadest support in the working class. Particular appeals must be made to dockworkers, railroaders and other key sections of the supply chain for a fighting unity, preparing joint actions across the United States and even the world.

At bottom, the contract at Boeing raises questions about the whole social system. The IAM bureaucrats have said for months that their top priority was to “save Boeing from itself.” But saving this private corporation—which can only mean restoring its profits and share values—is only possible on the basis of an evermore deeply exploited workforce.

The IAM reiterated this in their contract announcement. “Financially, the company finds itself in a tough position due to many self-inflicted missteps”—their polite term for depraved indifference which has killed hundreds, including their possible involvement in the mysterious deaths of two whistleblowers—[and], “It is IAM members who will bring this company back on track.” Unable to contain themselves, they then gush: “we love this company.”

The issue is not “saving” Boeing but taking it out of the hands of the corporate criminals. It must be transformed into a publicly-run utility, controlled by the workers themselves and organized to serve a critical public function, not to pad Wall Street’s profits.

This requires mobilizing the whole working class against corporate profits and the union bureaucrats that defend them.

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