Boeing workers hold mass rallies against sellout IAM contract

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9 September 2024

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.

On Monday, thousands of rank-and-file workers held a demonstration at Boeing's factory in Everett, Washington, to protest a sellout tentative agreement announced by the International Association of Machinists (IAM) in a sign of overwhelming and rapidly growing rank-and-file anger.

At the rally, which does not appear to have been officially organized by IAM District 751, workers chanted, "Strike! Strike!" One speaker, addressing the crowd with a bullhorn and using a staircase as a makeshift podium, declared: "We're going to reject that garbage contract" to resounding applause.

At factories in Renton and Frederickson, workers reported an ongoing symphony of air horns and drums throughout the day, ignoring management demands to cease. One worker posted a photo from his smart watch showing the noise level had reached 95 decibels.

The corporate press was forced to take anxious note of the mood, with Reuters reporting the deal "has angered many workers who were hoping for higher wage hikes and better pensions." Earlier in the day, news outlets had been crowing about the deal's worthless pledge to build the new 797 commercial airliner at the facility, a model which does not exist and has been stuck in the design phase for years.

The contract is a major sellout. After keeping workers under the same contract for 16 years, 10 of which were without pay increases, the new deal contains only a 25 percent pay raise over four years. It eliminates a performance bonus, does not improve pensions and contains loopholes allowing for unlimited "emergency" overtime. It also contains pledges for more "joint" programs, such as meetings between IAM officials and the Board of Directors, giving the bureaucrats the chance to rub elbows with the company's Wall Street owners.

On Tuesday night, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) issued a statement urging workers to reject the contract. It stressed that workers had to form committees excluding union officials to "enforce rank-and-file oversight" of the balloting to prevent fraud and prepare for a strike, as well as to link up with other sections of the working class.

IAM damage control

The anger has clearly stunned the union bureaucracy. On Monday afternoon, District 751 President Jon Holden sent a defensive email to the district's 33,000 members in a bid at damage control.

"A Tentative Agreement is not certain or fixed, and it's certainly not final," he pleaded. "This simply means that the bargaining team has negotiated every issue that we could to completion."

This claim they had negotiated "every issue" to "completion" directly contradicts what the IAM bureaucrats were saying only two days before they announced the TA. On Friday, they sent out an update claiming the "company and the Union are far apart from reaching an agreement." The miraculous tentative agreement by the end of the weekend can only mean the bureaucrats were lying to the membership and that they had a deal worked out all along.

Indeed, the IAM had already scheduled a vote for September 12, well before any contract officially existed.

Holden continued: "A 'Tentative Agreement' does not take away your right to evaluate the changes and decide whether you will vote to Accept the agreement and move

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forward or Reject the agreement and vote to Strike."

In reality, the IAM has already set up a loophole to potentially override a "no" vote. The ballot includes a second item on whether to strike (unnecessary since workers already voted 99.9 percent in favor in July), with the proviso that the contract will be automatically "ratified" if the strike vote does not pass by a two-thirds majority.

He then concludes: "We recommended acceptance because we can't guarantee we can achieve more in a strike." This amounts to a veiled threat that the bureaucracy will try to sabotage a strike, as it did in 2008.

Holden's email is in line with the initial announcement of the TA, where he wrote, "Financially, the company finds itself in a tough position due to many self-inflicted missteps. … That is why your Union Bargaining Committee is recommending accepting this proposal."

In reality, what can and cannot be achieved can only be decided through struggle. But a strike cannot succeed as long as it is in the hands of the IAM officials, who are in bed with Boeing executives. This means it is urgent that workers make preparations to assert their democratic control over the conduct of any strike.

Workers are acutely aware of how much has been lost over the past 16 years as Boeing had, until 2019, made record profits. Even after the two MAX 8 crashes in 2018 and 2019 and the ongoing slew of near-fatal accidents this year that have sent Boeing's stocks tumbling, its executives have still received exorbitant bonuses.

Ex-CEO David Calhoun made nearly $33 million in 2023, a 45 percent increase from his total compensation in 2022. Yet workers are being told the best they can get is an 11 percent pay raise in the first year of their contract.

Workers speak out

Workers were furious over Holden's letter. One told the *World Socialist Web Site*: "The contract that has been presented is an absolute slap in the face. The Union officials saying it is historic is a kick in the teeth. Holden lies, and manipulates for his own benefit. I don't want to decertify but I don't want to continue to pad that man's pockets."

Another wrote, "Union sold us out, promised to stand by us and took us to the bank instead." And another worker commented, "I don't have faith in Boeing, IAM and president Jon Holden to bargain in good faith for members."

Dozens of others denounced Holden on social media. "He, real quick went from 'Striking is our strength' [in July] to cower and fold cause striking won't give us anything," said one.

Another worker pointed to censorship on social media: "The union themselves did a victory lap via social media saying "WE DID IT!" then saw the reactions and turned off replies / deleted the post." This is a reference to a post on the District 751 Facebook page, which allegedly had more than 1,000 mostly hostile comments before being deleted.

Since then, the page's other posts have been flooded with demands from the rank and file to strike.

Many also made the connection between the tentative agreement to the months-long attempt by the IAM to gain a seat on Boeing's Board of Directors. "Did any of you actually expect a different approach and result from union 'leader' when a seat at the big table was at stake?"

Another wrote, "It's amazing he was able to get something out today, what with being in bed with Boeing. … The only thing he is Holden strong to is his position in the union and his board seat." And a further comment noted, "That's why he doesn't want us to strike because they'll take that away. Like we f*cking care."

Others have expressed concern that Holden's email might herald a new tentative agreement right before the strike vote on September 12. "Confusing people with another offer at the 11th hour," one worker questioned.

Both the union and Boeing are clearly caught flatfooted by the outpouring of rage at the contract and the determination to strike.

But workers must be on guard against further dirty tricks from both to get this contract passed.

The only way to carry the struggle forward is for workers to take their own independent initiative, establish rank-and-file committees, connect with other committees under the umbrella of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and prepare all sections of the working class for mass industrial action.

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