

Mobilize the working class behind the Boeing strike! Break the IAM-imposed isolation!

Jerry White**18 September 2024**

The strike by 33,000 Boeing workers in the states of Washington, Oregon and California, which began five days ago, is of immense significance for the working class throughout the US and internationally.

Workers are determined to win substantial wage increases to compensate for skyrocketing living costs and a de facto wage freeze of more than a decade. They also want to restore company-paid pensions, which the International Association of Machinists leadership allowed Boeing to take away a decade ago.

The fact that the walkout is taking place at all is the result of an incipient rebellion by rank-and-file workers against the IAM District 751 bureaucracy. By an astounding *95 percent*, workers rejected an IAM-backed deal and voted by *96 percent* to strike for the first time since the two-month walkout in 2008.

Workers refused to accept the demand by the company and the IAM bureaucracy that they pay for the corporation's financial crisis, which is the result of sacrificing safety to corporate profit and ignoring workers' warnings about unsafe practices that led to the deaths of hundreds of airline passengers.

Of particular importance was the solid opposition of young, newly hired workers, who rejected efforts to entice them to vote for the deal with a signing bonus. Unable to pay impossibly high rents for apartments in the Seattle area, let alone purchase a house, the young workers joined veterans in the fight for significant wage improvements and the restoration of pensions.

The scope of opposition has shocked the corporate media, Boeing executives and the Biden White House, which was working closely with the IAM leadership to block a strike. In a conference call with Morgan Stanley analysts last Friday, Boeing CFO Brian West said the company had "been working with the union leadership for a long time" and thought that the deal would be ratified. The deal had been "unanimously endorsed until it wasn't because endorsement by the union leadership versus the members was quite a disconnect."

Having taken this important step forward, workers are now confronted with even more fundamental questions. Boeing executives and the IAM bureaucracy are putting on a show about listening to workers' demands and refashioning an agreement that meets their needs. In addition, a mediator from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS)—whose top commissioner was appointed by President Biden—is taking part in the talks for a new contract.

But what is going on in the downtown Seattle luxury hotel is not "negotiations." It is a conspiracy by Boeing, the federal government and the IAM bureaucracy against the strikers. Their plan is to disarm workers with hopes of an improved agreement, while IAM leaders isolate the strike and try to starve workers into submission.

The IAM has \$300 million in assets and last year paid its International President Robert Martinez \$668,000 and District 751 President Jon Holden \$225,000 in total compensation. Yet IAM officials plan to pay Boeing workers \$250 a week in strike benefits and not until the third week of the strike.

At the same time, the IAM and AFL-CIO bureaucrats are doing everything they can to isolate the strike and prevent Boeing workers from waging a common fight with Washington state employees and workers on the docks, railroads and other workers facing the same fight.

At this point, the Biden-Harris administration is relying on the IAM bureaucracy to wear down the resistance of workers and quickly end the strike. But if the strike continues, the White House could intervene directly, claiming that the walkout is endangering "national security." In 2022, the Democratic president and both parties in Congress used this method to outlaw a strike by more than 100,000 railroad workers.

The Boeing strike is cutting across the administration's backing of the Israeli genocide in Gaza and its plans to escalate the US-NATO proxy war against Russia. Boeing was the largest supplier of missiles and munitions to the Israel Defense Forces between 2021 and 2023. In addition, *Aviation Week* reported that "Boeing's defense arm expects

strong growth in Europe as the ongoing war in Ukraine and worries over geopolitical dynamics drive nations on the continent to ratchet up military spending.”

The strike at Boeing and the walkout by 500 workers that just began in Jackson, Michigan against military contractor Eaton Aerospace pose real dangers to the ruling class, which has sought to use the labor bureaucracy to suppress opposition from the “enemy within,” the working class, while it wages imperialist war abroad.

The revolt by Boeing workers is part of a wave of rebellions by rank-and-file workers against the trade union bureaucracy, including the three-week strike by Dakkota auto parts workers in Chicago. Dakkota workers rejected four sellout agreements backed by the United Auto Workers bureaucracy before the UAW rammed through a fifth one through threats and intimidation.

The Boeing strike is also occurring amidst an unprecedented political crisis in the US in advance of the 2024 elections.

The Trump campaign is escalating its fascist rhetoric targeting immigrants and refugees, which it seeks to scapegoat for the social crisis. Trump and the Republicans, speaking for factions of the oligarchy that are moving toward open dictatorship, are threatening violence, whatever the outcome of the elections.

The Democrats, meanwhile, are covering up the fascist danger while focusing on the escalation of war, determined to suppress anything that gets in the way. An article in *Politico* warned that the Boeing strike could be followed by an October 1 strike by at least 25,000 dockworkers at ports along the Eastern Seaboard and the Gulf of Mexico, with potential solidarity action by West Coast dockers “that could create an enormous political headache for the waning months of the Biden administration ...”

On the picket lines, native-born workers are united with workers who were born in Asia, Africa and Latin America, demonstrating the international unity of the working class. The strike must become the basis for a powerful intervention of the working class throughout the US and throughout the world.

A group of militant aerospace mechanics established the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which has issued statements outlining a strategy to expand the strike and win workers’ demands. In a statement released Monday, the committee said:

The claim by the Boeing bosses, the IAM leaders and the federal mediators that a “win-win” agreement can be reached is total nonsense. This is not just a contract fight. It is a clash of opposing

forces whose interests are irreconcilable. In such a case, the victor is determined by who can bring the most powerful forces to the battle.

The statement continued:

We cannot win this struggle alone. The strike must be expanded to all sections of Boeing workers, including the engineers in SPEEA and non-union workers at the South Carolina plant. Informational pickets should be sent to win support from dockworkers, railroaders, Washington state employees, healthcare workers, education workers. A special campaign must be made to reach airline workers internationally at Air Canada and Airbus.

The fight by Boeing workers can and must be the beginning of an industrial and political counter-offensive by all sections of workers to fight for the social right to a secure and good-paying job, fully paid pensions, free healthcare and affordable housing.

This can only be achieved through the working class fighting to take political power into its own hands and transforming the giant corporations and banks into publicly owned enterprises. Instead of trillions being funneled into the coffers of the super-rich and wasted on war, the resources produced by the collective labor of the working class must be used for human needs.

Boeing must be converted into a public utility, collectively owned and democratically controlled by the workers and technicians who are committed to building safe airplanes. This must be part of the socialist transformation of economic and political life in the US and around the world.



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