

“They want a fair share the same as us”: Boeing, Textron and Eaton strikes continue as clash looms on East Coast docks

Diana Green
30 September 2024

Join the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee. To get more information, text (406) 414-7648, email boeingworkersrfc@gmail.com or fill out the form at the end of this article.

The strike by 33,000 Boeing workers has entered its third week, with no sign that the determination of the rank and file is softening.

On the contrary, the potential beginning of a strike tonight by 45,000 East Coast dockworkers has the prospect of transforming their struggle into part of a broader offensive by the working class against exploitation. “I believe they [the dockworkers] want a fair share the same as us, right?” a Boeing worker from Everett, Washington, told the WSWS.

At the same time, the corporate ruling class is continuing to search for ways to shut the strike down, in cooperation with the bureaucrats of the International Association of Machinists. Last Friday, the IAM met in closed door sessions with representatives from Boeing alongside a federal mediator. The IAM had unsuccessfully sought to ram through an 11th hour deal which workers rejected by 95 percent, forcing a strike.

Since then, a group of Boeing workers have founded the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee, in order to campaign for democratic control over the strike and to link up with other key sections of the working class. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, to which the Boeing committee is affiliated, has issued its own statement urging dockworkers to form a committee of their own.

Boeing workers have already been joined on strike by 5,000 Textron Aviation workers in Wichita, Kansas, and by 500 Eaton aerospace workers in Jackson, Michigan.

Like Boeing, Textron is a key US military supplier, while it also produces civilian Cessna and Beechcraft brand aircraft.

In a significant escalation, the company announced it will cut off strikers’ health insurance starting Monday. The IAM

bureaucracy has said that it will only provide assistance to those who have “significant health conditions and cannot temporarily go without health insurance,” despite the union holding over \$300 million in assets.

“The union negotiating committee acting like they are trying so hard for the union members is BS,” a striking Textron worker in Wichita, Kansas, told the WSWS. “When a coworker asked what the union was asking for when they said we were ‘far apart,’ they were told that they couldn’t have that information.

“How do we know what the committee is saying to Textron leaders? It should be all out in the open, every bit of it!”

The company’s reduction of health benefits under the rejected contract was a central point of opposition by workers, the worker said. “They are making tons of profit, and stocks are soaring. They got new government contracts, five years and \$10 billion worth of backlog, executives make anywhere from \$3 million all the way up to \$35 million.

“And the fact they want to make cuts from anything from the people in the factory doing all the hard work is a slap in the face. That’s why people came out of the woodwork to vote down the contract and to strike.”

The situation at the Eaton plant, a short drive from Detroit, center of the US auto industry, remains extremely tense. On Saturday night, one picketer was killed and several wounded when the picket line was struck by a motorist. Press reports have suggested the driver was impaired.

An Eaton worker sent the following statement of solidarity with the Boeing strike:

“Boeing workers are not only fighting for their own families, but they’re fighting for the future of younger employees there. So, the more we give up, the dimmer our future gets. The cost of living goes up, and basically, we turn into the poor working class. The working poor. You know, the American dream was getting a house and two cars and a nice family. You can’t even afford the house and one car,

even with both parents working and the education, you know, money for the education system, everything else. So, corporations are just sucking that up, feeding their stockholders.

“Here at Eaton, they want to use the money they save from getting rid of our pensions to start an electric vehicle battery division. That should be going to pay for my retirement. That should be going for paying for the future of our people. So that’s why I don’t agree with it. That’s why I’ll stay out here every day until I have to.”

“We literally hold people’s lives on a plane”

Joe, a Boeing worker at the Everett, Washington plant, spoke about the out-of-control cost of living. “I’ve lived in this state [Washington] for 40 years and I’ve seen the difference. I bought my house for \$150,000 and if I sell, I cannot buy a new one [as a similar home would cost] 800 grand right now or \$900,000.”

Among workers, there is growing awareness of the connection between their strike and the US-sponsored wars. Boeing is a major military contractor, providing warplanes and weapons to both the US military and its proxies around the world, including Ukraine and Israel.

“Every time there’s a war, there’s always going to be someone to profit off of it, especially defense contractors, you know, the military-industrial complex,” Boeing worker Ivan said. “They’re the people who basically benefit from war. Everyone else does not, not the people who’re on the front line on both sides, really.

“Of course, Russia is in the wrong for starting the invasion [of Ukraine] in the first place, especially with the kind of stuff they accuse Ukraine of. But at the same time ... [Russians] also are against this invasion.”

The Ukrainian people are not Nazis, he said, “but I don’t respect those who are Nazis, or, those who support [them]. One figure that I know is Stepan Bandera. He was a Ukrainian fascist insurgent who was active during World War II and he was responsible for massacring Polish people in western Ukraine and he was also very controversial.” Bandera is hailed as a “national hero” by the government of Ukraine.

“My own dad doesn’t like him too; I remember from childhood I was asking who he was and my dad just said, ‘He killed a lot of people. He’s not a good person.’ But that’s not all Ukrainians [who support Bandera], that’s more like the more ultra-nationalist Ukrainians are the ones who hate Russians in particular.”

A non-union Boeing employee also wanted to speak with reporters. “I think Boeing could end this in two weeks if they were interested in doing so ... [This strike] is also the straw that broke the camel’s back on all of the other labor-relation problems. For instance, I know you were talking to people out here who talk about the company’s emphasis on speed and a lack of quality, creating a culture of fear on the line where folks don’t feel safe to speak up about safety issues.

“I am not in the IAM, I’m a non-union member, but I’m just here to stand with my IAM co-workers, who I see as my friends and my neighbors. I’m not sure the negotiators do.”

Rosa, another Boeing worker, said, “We literally hold people’s lives on a plane. I feel like that has a bigger impact. We should get paid as much as we do for making the planes, making all the parts that have such a big impact.”

She spoke at length on the constant pressure to sacrifice safety. “I know that where I work, they tend to rush things along. Another issue is that from what I’ve noticed is that people who have been around the longest, as soon as they leave, they are bringing in new people that are not able to obtain the knowledge that they need to actually build the plane. They tell them to slap a band-aid on and say good enough.

“Boeing’s [response is] ‘just find a way to make it work, just make it work’ even though our machines barely function. We have to find little hacks and whatnot to try and hopefully get it right, but we’re wasting a lot of parts. We’re losing a lot of people that can fix machines, we’re losing a lot of knowledge, and we just don’t really want to invest much into it. At least that’s what it feels like to me, and I’ve seen a lot of lack of knowledge and a lot of loss of more experienced workers over the years. Safety is a big issue right now, especially with the lack of knowledgeable people.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact