

# Boeing's hard line in contract talks raises need for tripling strike pay

Bryan Dyne  
9 October 2024

*Take up the fight for rank-and-file control! Join the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File committee by texting (406) 414-7648, emailing boeingworkersrfc@gmail.com or filling out the form at the end of this article.*

The latest round of government-mediated talks between Boeing and the International Association of Machinists (IAM) leadership broke down on Tuesday, ending with the company withdrawing the offer it sent directly to the membership on September 23. About 33,000 machinists in Washington, Oregon and California are about to complete their fourth week on strike.

Blaming each other, Boeing claimed that the IAM “did not seriously consider our proposals” while the union leadership wrote that the aerospace giant “refused to propose any wage increases, vacation/sick leave accrual, progression, ratification bonus” or reinstate company pensions.

The offer Boeing withdrew was a trial balloon designed to test workers’ resolve. It included a 30 percent pay increase, below workers’ demands for a 40 percent pay increase. Workers are also demanding the restoration of pensions stolen from them in a 10-year contract extension rammed through by the IAM in 2014.

The company provocatively issued the proposal last month directly to workers through the press, demanding at the time they ratify it by the end of the week. The IAM, however, waited the entire day before issuing a statement attacking the proposal, only once it became clear that workers overwhelmingly opposed the proposal. The strike itself only took place after workers rebelled against a sellout contract backed by the IAM offering 25 percent pay increases, which workers voted down by 95 percent.

After nearly a month on strike, Boeing is only hardening its position against the workers. It is determined to inflict a humiliating defeat upon workers in retaliation against their determination.

The withdrawal of the offer underscores the need for workers to take control of the strike out of the hands of the union apparatus by building the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee. Boeing is relying on the IAM bureaucracy,

which has spent years imposing concessions, including in 2008 when it imposed massive concessions following a two-month strike.

Boeing also knows it can count on the White House, which is working with the IAM apparatus to shut down the strike at the major defense contractor. Last week, Biden worked with the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA) to shut down the East Coast docks strike after three days, a move the WSWS characterized as the union “[riding] to the rescue of the Biden administration” to “ensure the flow of weapons for America’s global wars.”

One Boeing worker told the WSWS, “It’s just crazy, they are prolonging it as long as they can. You think they’d want to get back to business. Instead they’re losing money playing child games!

“This isn’t their first rodeo! And I think the union should have asked for a 40 percent pay increase on day one. Over four years is not enough to catch up with inflation now! Four years from now it could be higher!”

Boeing faces losses of about \$3.5 billion a month as a result of the strike. At the same time, S&P Global Ratings is considering downgrading the company’s credit rating to junk status. It was only able to deliver 33 planes last month, of which 10 had been ready prior to the strike.

Nevertheless, Boeing’s executives appear to believe that they can outlast the workers. They have already taken measures to maintain cash, including the furlough of the company’s engineering staff at the plants being struck, as well as considering selling off \$10 billion of its stock to raise cash.

The company can also rely on money from its massive defense contracts, which has swelled due to White House aid for the Israeli genocide as well as the proxy war in Ukraine. Data from the Department of Defense indicates that the value of Boeing’s defense contracts has surged to \$34 billion, almost doubling from last year as a result of aircraft and bomb sales.

## **Demand tripling of strike pay to \$750 per week!**

Workers must demand adequate provisioning of the strike to allow them to fight this transnational corporation. In particular, they must demand the immediate increase of strike pay to \$750 per week.

The IAM bureaucracy is consciously trying to starve workers out on \$250 in strike pay, which was only distributed on the third week of the strike. They are also not providing any direct support for members' healthcare, which ended at the end of September. Workers on social media have widely commented that many have had to get second jobs to sustain themselves during the strike as a result of the paltry strike pay.

This is despite the fact that District 751 holds \$79 million in assets, and the International holds \$300 million financed by workers' dues money. This is enough to pay every Boeing striker \$750 a week in strike pay for 15 weeks.

While strikers are having to work as Uber drivers to get by, District 751 President Jon Holden continues to make his lavish \$225,000 salary. International President Bryan Bryant's predecessor Robert Martinez made \$668,000 last year, according to federal filings.

All told, last year the IAM national headquarters alone spent over \$214 million, including \$55 million on "representational activities" (salaries), \$3.3 million on "political activities and lobbying," \$17.9 million on "general overhead," \$30.5 million on "union administration"—and only \$556,786 on strike benefits.

By the end of the Boeing strike's fourth week, the union will have spent only \$16.5 million in strike pay, less than one-third of what the International paid to its small army of functionaries last year.

Boeing workers must demand that their money be put to use on the strike! Last month, the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee issued a statement which declared:

The \$300 million in assets controlled by the IAM belong to the members. That money should not be used to pay high salaries to union bureaucrats, to fund the campaigns of politicians, who are stooges for Boeing, or to pay for new union headquarters.

We would suggest that the salaries of the top IAM officials immediately be reduced to what striking workers receive. This includes: IAM International President Robert Martinez (reported \$668,000 salary in 2023) and Holden's \$225,000 salary. In addition, the IAM is able to use its hundreds of millions of dollars in real estate holdings and stock market

investments as collateral to borrow enough to pay us what we need.

While demanding their battle be adequately provisioned, Boeing workers must establish a fighting unity with other key sections of workers. In addition to the East Coast dockworkers, last month's statement cited in particular "Alaska Airlines flight attendants who voted to reject the contract brought back by their union last month, striking Textron Aviation workers in Kansas who voted down an IAM-backed contract like ours, railroad workers fighting the elimination of jobs and one-man crews, and Seattle teachers fighting school closures [and] [d]ockworkers in Seattle and Tacoma want to stop handling containers with Boeing parts."

In particular, Boeing workers must organize joint action with railroaders through the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee (RWRFC), which is conducting a fight against the sellout contracts which the rail unions are attempting to impose. In a statement Wednesday, the RWRFC declared, "The power of the working class is our strength in numbers. To maximize our strength, we must not only unite across the rail industry but with workers in other industries as well, across the US and the world who are also fighting against sellouts."

Workers cannot wait to take the initiative. If the IAM bureaucrats remain in control of the strike, it will end in one of two ways: Either the bureaucracy will wear workers down and force through a deal virtually identical to the one workers rejected last month, or the Biden administration will force it to end, either through an injunction or through mediation, which amounts to a de facto injunction.

The critical question is the development of the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee as an alternative leadership, based not on imposing what the company says it can afford but on mobilizing the strength of the working class against corporate slavery.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**