

Sellout contract at Boeing aimed at securing supply chains for world war

Tom Hall**21 October 2024**

On Wednesday, 33,000 Boeing workers are voting on an International Association of Machinists (IAM) contract that would end their five-week strike. Workers must reject it by the widest margin because it does not meet any of their demands on wages, pensions and other key issues. It also green-lights mass layoffs that management has already begun, both in retaliation against the strike and to pay for the massive safety crisis that has killed hundreds of people.

The fight at Boeing requires a new strategy, based on a rebellion against the IAM bureaucracy, which never wanted the strike and which has tried to soften workers up on the picket line with inadequate strike pay. As the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee declared in a statement Monday: “We must fight for the principle that the rank and file holds absolute authority, not union officials rubbing elbows with management and government officials.”

At the same time, the struggle at Boeing raises the fundamental question of who runs society and in whose interests. Boeing workers must respond to the ruthlessness of the company with the demand for its nationalization under workers’ control, as part of the transformation of economic life as a whole.

The Boeing workers confront not just a rotten contract, nor just one company. The moves to shut down the strike are intimately connected to the overall war policy of the ruling class. This is a wartime contract, aimed at securing supply chains by breaking a strike by workers at a major defense contractor. The intervention by Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su was crucial to securing the deal, much as the government intervened to shut down the Gulf Coast and East Coast dockworkers’ strike earlier this month.

US imperialism is on the brink of war with Iran as Israel’s genocide in Gaza expands into a regional war

in the Middle East. At the same time, the US is escalating its proxy war with Russia to the point of a nuclear exchange and preparing a new war against its main rival, China. All of these conflicts are, in fact, the initial stages of a global war. The American ruling class cannot allow these plans to be interfered with by the massive opposition within the working class to exploitation and inequality.

Military and economic, domestic and foreign policies are all being subordinated to the single goal of all-out conflict with the rivals of US capitalism. The Biden administration bragged in its 2022 National Security Strategy that it “has broken down the dividing line between domestic and foreign policy.”

A *Wall Street Journal* comment on the Boeing strike Monday summed up the strategic thinking of the ruling class. “The US is in a geopolitical contest with China defined not just by military power but economic and technological prowess,” the *Journal*’s chief economics commenter Greg Ip wrote. Boeing remains the single largest US manufacturing exporter, for which no ready alternative exists.

Ip also cited chipmaker Intel’s role in providing an alternative source of semiconductors to Taiwan, which would be the main battleground in a war with China. Therefore, “much as national leaders would like to ignore these companies’ woes, they can’t. National security dictates the US maintain some know-how in making aircraft and semiconductors.”

The ruling class cannot implement its war policy without mobilizing and subordinating all of society to it. First and foremost, this requires that the resistance of workers, expressed in the growing number of strikes over the past four years, be smashed.

The bureaucrats in the International Association of Machinists and other unions are not just pro-corporate

sellouts, but instruments of statecraft. Every major betrayal in the recent period, from the strike ban against railroaders to the mass layoffs signed off for at UPS, the auto industry and elsewhere, was closely coordinated with the White House in order to secure US supply chains and industry for conflict with the foreign rivals of Wall Street.

This is the real content of Biden's labor policies, made clear in July when he called the trade unions his "domestic NATO."

Summing up the bureaucracy's outlook, United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain hails the production of bombers during World War II and that period's wartime economy as the example for workers to follow today. Fain and the UAW apparatus are currently isolating a strike at Boeing parts supplier Eaton, after sanctioning the layoff of more than 2,300 workers at Stellantis.

Another key function of war is to impose an artificial "national unity" by directing massive social tensions outward towards a foreign "enemy." It is an important element of the response of the ruling class to the growing wave of strikes by workers across the US and the world, driven by anger over massive inequality and eroding standards of living.

But the conditions that drive capitalism towards war also create the impulse for social revolution. The wars are deeply unpopular from the start, and their connection to massive attacks on the working class is demonstrating to workers that the trillions being spent on war ultimately are coming at their expense.

Workers at Boeing's rivals are also fighting against massive cuts, as each national section of capitalists competes to determine who can extract the most profits from workers. Brazilian workers at Embraer have rejected their own sellout contract, Airbus workers are fighting mass layoffs and Eaton workers from Britain to Michigan are carrying out strikes.

The growing social anger in the working class is driving it into conflict with the union bureaucracy, expressed in the growing series of contract rejections and rebellions. The most conscious expression of this is the growth of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

Meanwhile, all of the official political parties have nothing to offer workers but different forms of dictatorship and war. Trump's attack last week on the

"enemy within" expresses how the entire ruling class sees workers at home, even more so than China or Russia, as the main danger.

As the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee explained in its statement Monday, "Our strike has also revealed the fact that society is divided into two huge camps: the workers who create the wealth and the capitalists who live by exploiting us. Our strike is a fight over who controls society's wealth, us or them."

For workers, this requires a new strategy, based on mobilizing their immense power independently of the pro-war capitalist parties and their trade union lackeys. Rejecting the false "national unity" of imperialist war, they must unite across the world on the basis of their common interests. The working class, which has no interest in imperialist plunder, can only defend its interests through an uncompromising fight against war.

The fight against war, however, requires a fight against its source in the capitalist profit system itself. The struggle at Boeing poses directly the need for workers' control of production, including the nationalization of Boeing itself. It is the subordination of production to the ruthless drive for profit that is responsible for the endless series of disasters, as well as the escalation of attacks on Boeing workers.

This in turn must be connected to the fight for workers' power, for the reorganization of society to meet social needs, not private profit, on the basis of global planning, not imperialist war. This is the program of socialism.



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