

Boeing machinists to vote on sellout contract to end five-week strike

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

The 33,000 machinists on strike at Boeing in Washington, Oregon and California are voting Wednesday on a pro-company deal brokered by the White House.

The four-year contract announced Saturday by the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) is well below workers' demands. Pay raises of 35 percent does not make up for a decade of wage freezes, and insurance premiums have not gone down as medical costs rise. There is no additional paid time off except for a single floating holiday.

The contract also does not restore the company pension, which was taken from workers in a 10-year contract extension rammed through in 2014. It effectively sanctions mass layoffs which Boeing has already announced during the strike, as the company moves to impose the cost of the massive safety crisis on its commercial airliners on the backs of workers.

Above all, the deal is a pro-war contract, brokered by the White House and acting Labor Secretary Julie Su to protect the operations of a major US defense contractor, as US imperialism stands on the brink of all-out war with Iran.

On Monday, the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee issued a statement urging workers to reject the deal. "We must fight for the principle that the rank and file holds absolute authority, not union officials rubbing elbows with management and government officials." In particular, the Committee called for rank-and-file oversight of the vote, given the widespread suspicions of IAM ballot stuffing in 2014 and in a recent vote to end a strike at Textron Aviation.

"We have to appeal to workers all over the world, not just for moral solidarity but for a fighting unity, answering the corporate conspiracy against our strike with the massive power of the working class," the statement concluded.

One worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*: "They didn't address the key issues of the members, which is the retirement, and they didn't address correctly on how they're going to be taking care of the medical. The contract is a joke.

"There are small improvements to the contract, but they're way below what we're looking for at this point. The new hires would really feel the pinch. And it makes it difficult to bring in new talent. We cannot get people with experience or people willing to move all the way up here to perform this work on these wages."

A report in Reuters Tuesday nervously acknowledged wide opposition to the deal, citing the comments of a Wells Fargo analyst who told reporters, "Our analysis of over 1,000 online comments implies a more constructive view" than the first contract which workers rejected by 95 percent, forcing the IAM to call a strike, "but still not enough to pass."

The IAM bureaucracy aims not so much to persuade workers to support the deal as much as to wear down their opposition and convince them that they cannot get anything better. "I'm concerned that both Boeing and the IAM are trying to shove this down our throats," one worker told the WSWS. "I'm not happy with the union; you try and survive on \$250 a week [in strike pay]. But they're taking our money and they get their pension and could sit out as long as they want. Everyone is paid above \$100,000 in that union leadership."

On Monday, the IAM held a snap online meeting to review the contract, giving workers only a few minutes

notice. Another meeting was then held Tuesday afternoon.

“[District 751 President Jon Holden] just focused on the bullet point answers,” one worker said of the Tuesday meeting. “He dodged and dismissed the questions he couldn’t answer. We couldn’t directly ask questions. We had to send them in to be read by someone else for Jon to answer. So a lot of people did not get their questions addressed.”

Notably, union officials declined to officially endorse this tentative agreement. This is a cynical maneuver to try to and palm off responsibility for bringing the contract to a vote. If it is ratified, effectively under economic duress, the bureaucracy will claim that the vote represents the “will of the membership.” If it is rejected, they hope to provide cover for themselves and avoid a repeat of the embarrassment after workers voted down the first deal, which the union had endorsed, by 95 percent.

At the Monday meeting, according to one worker, union officials again claimed that they could not “promise anything” if workers reject the deal and continue to strike. The IAM bureaucrats have repeated this lie every step of the way. It had endorsed the first contract workers rejected on the grounds that workers could do no better than a 25 percent pay increase.

The reality is that they are attempting to shut down the strike because of its immense social power. The strike has halted production of the 737 Max and the 767 and 777 models. Boeing, the largest US manufacturing exporter, has lost an estimated \$5 billion in the first month of the strike and its credit may get downgraded to junk status if the strike continues.

There is enormous support for Boeing workers from the global aerospace industry. Workers at Boeing supplier Eaton have launched strikes in Michigan, Illinois and Britain, while workers at Boeing’s rivals Airbus and Embraer are fighting against corporate attacks.

There is also enormous opposition growing in the wider working class to union sellouts, including on the railroads, among postal workers and in the auto factories. If workers organize independently of the IAM apparatus, they can expand this support into a broader movement of the whole working class.

Fear of this is why Wall Street has dedicated \$35 billion to help Boeing fight the strike. A Barron’s

article on Monday quoted a Bank of America report, that the financial institution is “more optimistic about members voting in favor of the deal given the acting U.S. Secretary of Labor Julie Su was directly involved with the negotiations, and pressure is ramping up from both sides.”

Expressing the collective desire by the financial elite, the report continued, “If union members do agree to end the strike, the supply chain, investors, and Boeing management will share a collective sigh of relief.”

The relief would also be shared by the White House and both capitalist parties. In particular, the strike at Boeing is a direct threat to the ongoing war in Ukraine against Russia, the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza, and new wars against Lebanon and Iran. From the US government’s perspective, crushing the strike at Boeing is a critical step in securing the home front for the wars abroad.

The ruling class is keenly aware that a victory by workers to restore pensions at a major industrial center would trigger a wave of similar struggles across the United States, using Boeing machinists as an example. Wall Street stands to lose not just billions to workers at Boeing, but hundreds of billions across every industry.

But for victory, workers need a new strategy. As the Boeing Committee declared in its statement on the contract: If anything has been proven over the past month, it is that the chief obstacle to our unity is the dictatorship of the bureaucracy in the unions. We have to connect a broad appeal with a rank-and-file rebellion to transfer power from the apparatus to workers ourselves.

“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.”



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