

33,000 Boeing machinists vote down latest pro-company contract by 64 percent

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Take up the fight for rank-and-file control! To join the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee, text (406) 414-7648, email boeingworkersrfc@gmail.com or fill out the form at the end of this article.

In voting Wednesday, Boeing machinists rejected by 64 percent another pro-company contract presented to them by Boeing and the International Association of Machinists (IAM) bureaucrats and brokered by acting Labor Secretary Julie Su.

This is the second sellout contract which workers have overwhelmingly rejected. Workers voted down the first by 95 percent in mid-September, forcing the union to call the strike of 33,000 workers.

Wednesday's deal again fell far short of workers' demands. The 35 percent pay raise does not make up for years of stagnating wages alongside record inflation, the single extra floating holiday does not allow workers time to spend with their friends and families, and medical coverage has not kept up with the rising costs driven by the healthcare industry.

In addition to demanding a minimum 40 percent raise, machinists are also calling for the restoration of their pensions stolen in 2014, when the IAM allowed Boeing to extort workers by threatening to move production of the 737 jetliner to its nonunion plant in South Carolina.

In rejecting the deal, workers have dealt a powerful blow not just to Boeing management, but to the IAM bureaucracy and, above all, to US imperialism and the pro-corporate political establishment. Both Wall Street and the American government were relying on the union apparatus to end the strike, which has now gone on for six weeks, to clear up the supply chains for war.

The key strategic issue now is bringing broader sections of the working class into a joint struggle with Boeing machinists. The growth of struggles across the global aerospace industry, including three strikes at Boeing supplier Eaton, mass layoffs at Airbus and a contract rejection at Embraer show the immense potential for Boeing workers to mobilize workers across the US and the world.

This requires that workers begin organizing through the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee to assert their democratic will over the conduct of the strike.

As the committee wrote Monday in a statement calling for a no vote, "we propose ... The mobilization of the working class behind our strike. We must fan out to the docks, the schools, the factories and other workplaces, setting up informational pickets and using other methods to urge them to support our fight."

Workers versus the White House

The next stage of the strike will pit workers more directly against Wall Street and the White House. The lessons of past struggles, particularly that of the fight by railroaders in 2022, are critical. Then, in order to overwrite the democratic will of some 120,000 workers which rejected multiple sellout contracts, Congress stepped in to impose the contract and pre-emptively ban a strike.

That struggle pit railroaders against the rail union bureaucrats, who worked with Washington to buy them the time they needed to prepare the legislation. In response, workers formed the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee.

Defeating government intervention, the Committee explained in its founding statement, "depends not only on organizing ourselves independently to ensure maximum unity and solidarity, but also that we hold no illusions in the bought-and-paid-for political stooges of Wall Street."

District 751 President Jon Holden all but admitted that not only might the government intervene more directly, but it will be invited to do so by the IAM bureaucracy. He told King 5 Seattle after the rejection vote, "We were able to get traction with [Acting] Labor Secretary Julie Su, and I will reach out again to the White House to see if we can get some assistance and see if we can get this resolved."

After one of two informational meetings held earlier this week on the contract, one worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “The company wouldn’t budge on basically everything! Why did you even bring it to our attention then? They wouldn’t even budge on the money for A&Ps, which was a big no-no with me and others.

“After that Zoom meeting, I was pissed. I could tell [IAM District 751 President Jon Holden] was just tired of the whole deal. He kept saying, ‘it’s in the members’ hands.’ Really? Why do we pay for you? A strong leader would’ve got up and walked out like Boeing has done to us already twice! And would’ve told them to bring a better deal like they did to him!”

During the voting, WSWS reporters visited the polling station in Renton. One worker commented, “Jon Holden is trying to play all angles. I would guess that 40 percent of us think it’s going to be a hard fight to get pensions back, but we should try.”

She continued, “It’s very telling that our union has been recommending all these Democratic candidates, boosting them as they come down to the picket lines. This is a ‘both sides’ contract, but this is not a ‘both sides’ fight ... they are betraying us.”

Boeing digs in—Workers must respond

Boeing is losing an estimated \$5 billion a month as a result of the strike, and it has been threatened with a downgrade of its credit to junk status. However, backed by Wall Street and the government, it is digging in its heels. In a provocation, Boeing has announced 17,000 layoffs, which would have more than offset whatever minor changes were made to its offer.

In an interview with CNBC, Boeing CEO Kelly Ortberg claimed that the announced layoffs are as a result of “overstaffing.”

The argument is absurd. Boeing has cut hundreds of safety and quality jobs over the past several years, which directly contributed to the two deadly 737 MAX 8 crashes, which killed 346 passengers and crew, and the door blowout on a MAX 9 in January. As workers well know, quality and safety is being sacrificed for profits.

The same day as the vote, Ortberg met with Boeing shareholders to discuss the company’s quarterly financial results, as well as the strike itself. At the meeting, he stated that he was “very hopeful that the package we put forward will allow our employees to come back to work so we can immediately focus on restoring the company.”

Ortberg also reported that the company lost \$6.2 billion in the third quarter, the last two weeks of which overlapped with the first two weeks of the strike. Major losses were reported in multiple commercial and defense programs, including the failed Boeing Starliner spacecraft.

Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party’s candidate for US vice president, issued a statement in response to the result:

The 65 percent rejection of the second sellout contract by Boeing workers is a courageous stand for the entire working class. In rejecting this deal, Boeing workers have defied the conspiracy of Boeing executives, their Wall Street backers, the Biden-Harris administration and the IAM bureaucracy. They have insisted that workers have the social right to livable wages, secure jobs and pensions that ensure dignity in retirement.

This vote is a powerful blow to the White House and both corporate-controlled parties, which are desperate to shut down this strike. They see the Boeing strike as a threat because it could interfere with military production and disrupt the war plans of American imperialism. Boeing is a major defense contractor, and any disruption threatens the profits of the ruling elite and their global war machine.

But this vote cannot be the end of the fight—it must be the beginning of a struggle waged on an entirely different basis. The rejection of the contract shows the enormous determination of workers, but the future of this struggle must be placed in the hands of the rank and file. Workers cannot rely on the IAM bureaucracy, which has tried twice now to impose a sellout deal. Boeing workers must form rank-and-file committees to take control of this fight, demand full strike pay, and reach out to workers in every industry, in the US and internationally, to build a united struggle.

The Socialist Equality Party and our election campaign stand in full solidarity with Boeing workers. Your fight is a fight for all workers, against the corporate system and the war machine it sustains.



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