

The role of the Biden administration in the Boeing sellout

Bryan Dyne

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In the aftermath of the passage of the contract vote for Boeing machinists earlier this week, President Joe Biden issued a statement hailing the contract between the International Association of Machinists (IAM) and Boeing as “an agreement that reflects the hard work and sacrifice of 33,000 Machinist workers.” The statement went on to claim that, “This contract provides a 38% wage increase over four years, improves workers’ ability to retire with dignity, and supports fairness at the workplace.”

The Biden administration played a key role in brokering the deal. In addition to a federal mediation team, Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su and National Economic Adviser Lael Brainard helped craft the deal. Su, in particular, flew to Seattle three separate times, as well as “hosting [Boeing] CEO Kelly Ortberg at her office in D.C.,” according to Axios.

In her own statement, Su called the contract a “historic agreement.”

In reality, the contract is a major victory for Boeing and corporate America. The contract fell short of the workers’ actual wage demand of a 40 percent raise over *three* years, based on a decade in which wages stagnated in the face of 43 percent inflation since 2014. It also completely left out the restoration of defined-benefit pensions, which were stolen from workers in a conspiracy between Boeing and the IAM bureaucracy during the 2013-2014 contract extension talks.

The real focus of the Biden administration has always been to ensure “Boeing’s future as a critical part of America’s aerospace sector,” by which Biden means the corporation’s role as the chief US exporter and

major defense contractor. Boeing is a critical supplier of planes and bombs used in Israel’s US-backed genocide in Gaza and the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

The machinists’ strike stopped production of the KC-46 tanker and the P-8 maritime aircraft, directly impacted American capitalism’s ability to wage war abroad and threatened production of an even wider swath of war materiel, especially if the strike expanded to workers in Boeing’s Defense, Space & Security division.

Moreover, whatever Boeing will lose as a result of higher wages it will make up through layoffs and other forms of retaliation against workers. Even before the strike ended, the company announced the elimination of 17,000 positions across the company, which the IAM apparatus made no issue of during the strike.

In contrast, the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee (BWRFC), which was formed to fight against the sellout of the strike by the union bureaucracy, warned in mid-October, “After contracts were passed last year at UPS and in the auto industry, management unleashed massive job cuts prepared well in advance. But Boeing has already started this even before we have signed anything.

“The 17,000 global job cuts are a declaration of war. They want to replace a highly trained, expert workforce with low-paid casual workers at the beck and call of management. This is why they have added such terms as a probationary period for new employees.”

And further redundancies may begin as soon as this coming Tuesday. The Strike Settlement Agreement between the company and the IAM bureaucracy notes that any employees who have not reported to work for their shift on November 12 “will be considered to have voluntarily resigned their employment.”

One comment on social media urgently warned that their spouse was “given a heads up by a manager who happens to be a friend that it’s super important to arrive on time on your first day back if it happens to be on Tuesday. The manager mentioned people are potentially going to be terminated even by showing up a few minutes late as the company is looking for any reason to cut costs.”

Workers elsewhere are facing similar, if not worse retribution for going on strike for essentially the same issues as the Boeing machinists. Just a few days after Boeing machinists went on strike, 5,000 IAM machinists at Textron Aviation also went on strike. But instead of waging a joint struggle, the IAM bureaucracy forced workers to strike separately, resulting in a deal at Textron worse than the offer initially rejected in September.

At Eaton Aerospace, where 525 workers are still on strike, the company has begun to hire scabs to replace the strikers.

And across the Gulf Coast and East Coast docks, port operators are determined to carry out a plan of mass automation after the strike by 45,000 dockworkers was shut down by the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA), also working in conjunction with the Biden administration. While the Democrats and union bureaucracy claim that the 62 percent raise over six years is (again) a “victory,” ocean carriers have asserted that “US trade competitiveness” will require that jobs be slashed, as automation is implemented, all on behalf of corporate profits and share values.

The claim that there is no money for jobs, however, is completely false. During the Boeing strike, the company secured a \$10 billion loan and sold more than \$20 billion in assets to raise cash and prevent a credit downgrade to junk status during the strike. And, as one worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “they lost more money because of the strike than they would have if they just gave us the 40 percent raise immediately.”

Indeed, for Boeing, more was at stake than just the wage increase. There is an ongoing effort by the entire ruling elite to restructure class relations in order to more completely facilitate the war drive by American imperialism and subordinate all sectors of the economy to the military.

That is why Biden has referred to the trade union bureaucracies as his “domestic NATO” and why the

administration has been so heavily involved in suppressing every strike during his tenure. Most infamously, Biden and Congress acted together to outlaw the impending strike of 120,000 railroaders in 2022. Instead of opposing the strikebreaking operation, the union bureaucracies, including the IAM, all enforced the no-strike order.

In opposition to the concerted efforts by Wall Street, the capitalist state and their corporatist trade union lackeys to suppress the class struggle, rank-and-file workers must build their own organizations to fight back. An important step was taken by forming the BWRFC, which is part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), a network of rank-and-file committees around the world seeking to break the isolation of individual struggles and to forge a unified working class movement to fight against war. That initiative must be expanded, unifying the fight of Boeing workers with workers in other critical industries, including dockworkers, railroaders, autoworkers and others in mass political struggle to bring an end to the capitalist mode of production and establish workers’ power.



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