

Taking lead from Trump's dictatorship bid, Boeing hires replacement workers to break defense strike

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Boeing announced Thursday that it will begin hiring permanent replacement workers for the 3,200 workers on strike at its defense plants in the St. Louis area, now in their sixth week on the picket lines. The decision is a deliberate provocation, carried out with the full backing of Wall Street and the Trump administration. It must be answered by a mass mobilization of workers in St. Louis and throughout the country in support of the strike.

The isolation of the strike by the officials of the International Association of Machinists, who never wanted the strike in the first place, must be ended. This can only be done through the building of new leadership, drawn from the rank and file, to take control out of the hands of the saboteurs in the IAM bureaucracy and fight for the broadest possible appeal to workers across the region and the country.

The corporate and state establishment will not allow workers' resistance to endanger the massive rearmament program aimed at war with Russia and China. The St. Louis plants produce missiles and fighter jets for the US military, along with the Israel Defense Forces, and are preparing production of the next generation F-47. Boeing is also bidding for the contract for the Navy's F/A-XX program.

But what enrages the ruling class even more than any slowdown in military equipment is the specter of working-class opposition spreading across society. Boeing workers struck after rejecting a contract with only 20 percent pay increases over four years, while doing little to shorten the path for workers to the top rate. Across the country, workers confront an impossible cost of living alongside record corporate profits, which amount to an attempt to roll back living standards by generations.

Boeing workers are not alone. They are striking alongside hundreds of GE Aerospace workers in

Cincinnati producing engines for US Navy warships, part of the same supply chain of militarism. The strikebreaking measures at Boeing are at the same time a warning for GE workers, who confront not only management but a United Auto Workers bureaucracy braying for war. It poses the need for unity between workers at both companies.

The corporate dictatorship Boeing workers are fighting finds its most complete expression in the Trump administration. Boeing's actions cannot be separated from the deployment of the military into American cities. On Monday, Trump announced the start of "Operation Midway Blitz," preparing to deploy the National Guard into Chicago, with dozens of other cities to follow. This is part of his unfolding plan to establish a fascist dictatorship in the United States.

The target of these measures is the American working class, as the attack at the same time on the Boeing strikers underscores. Combining its fight against inequality and poverty with a fight for democratic rights, the working class must become the vanguard fighters against dictatorship.

Workers in the United States have bitter experience with the deployment of the state militia, supplemented by Pinkerton agents and other company thugs, to gun down striking workers generations ago. Ludlow, Blair Mountain, Homestead and the locations of other strikes have become bywords in American history for the savage violence American capitalists have meted out against workers fighting for their most minimal rights. But what is now being prepared goes far beyond even a return to such methods. It is the abolition of even the semblance of democracy.

This trajectory was presaged by the Democratic Party. During the mass protests against the police murder of Michael Brown in St. Louis in 2014, it was Democratic

officials who oversaw the deployment of MRAPs and other weapons of the so-called “war on terror” onto American streets. And today, Democrats are joining hands with Republicans in crushing anti-war protests on university campuses.

Boeing’s move to hire scabs has Trump’s fingerprints all over it. It is inconceivable that such a step would have been taken without close consultation with the White House. In fact, it is certain that the administration has been involved from the beginning.

Trump is able to get away with this because of the studied silence of the Democrats and the union bureaucracy. Both are terrified of the implications of a movement from below. The unions made no mention of the strike in their Labor Day speeches, and they even refused to hold events in Washington, D.C., where the National Guard has already been deployed, in order to avoid raising it. Even worse, many are openly lining up behind Trump. The heads of the UAW, Teamsters and International Longshore Association repeat the nationalist lie that his trade war will bring back jobs, even as they help American corporations carry out mass layoffs.

The IAM bureaucracy, for its part, is doing nothing to resist Boeing’s strikebreaking. Tom Boelling, IAM District 837 president, issued only a perfunctory statement to the press, dismissing the danger and offering “free advice” to Boeing not to anger workers.

Nothing about this is featured on the front page of the IAM website. But there is an article about a local fundraiser for dogs. This says everything about how the bureaucracy views workers: they treat them worse than animals.

The IAM did everything it could to prevent the strike. Now it is attempting to isolate and defeat it. They are starving workers on \$200 a week in strike pay. The bureaucracy’s only concern is that it continues to collect dues, no matter who is working in the plants after the strike is over.

Earlier, the IAM even appealed to Trump to intervene in the strike, absurdly telling workers that he would take their side. In reality, the bureaucracy wanted Trump’s intervention to help them shut it down. At the same time, they appealed to extreme-right figures such as Senator Josh Hawley, as well as to Democratic Party “allies” in Congress.

In the meantime, the bureaucracy is using Boeing’s threats to step up its campaign of intimidation, insisting that workers are helpless and that nothing can be done. This is a lie. Workers can draw upon immense reserves of

anger built up over decades of inequality and exploitation, reaching a breaking point today. But this requires a new strategy: the mobilization of the working class against the company, the state, and the union bureaucracy itself.

A rank-and-file strike committee must be built, composed of trusted workers from the shop floor and excluding the union officials. Workers must take control of the strike as part of a rebellion against the bureaucracy, which functions as management’s agents while monopolizing hundreds of millions in dues money to fund their own salaries.

The demands of such a committee must include:

\$800 a week in strike pay.

- Workers’ control over picketing, including the organization of flying pickets to appeal for support across the region.

- The shutdown of Boeing’s entire operations, particularly measures to prevent the training of strikebreakers, and an appeal for solidarity strikes by civilian aircraft Boeing workers, who themselves struck last year only to be betrayed and sent back to work under a IAM sellout contract.

- Rank-and-file control over bargaining, including the livestreaming of all talks and the publication of all correspondence between the bureaucracy and the government. A rank-and-file bargaining team must ensure the fight is conducted for what workers actually need, not against them behind closed doors.

Above all, workers must unite with their class brothers and sisters around the world through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to build a common struggle against inequality and exploitation.

As the WSWS Labor Day statement explained: “it is high time that workers organize and prepare their own counteroffensive. The working class possesses immense social power to shut down production, bring the entire economy to a halt and overthrow the ruling class. But this power can only be realized through independent organization and political clarity.”

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