

Strike by Boeing defense workers continues into third month, as IAM and management resume mediated talks

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Talks resumed Monday between Boeing and the International Association of Machinists (IAM) union under the auspices of a federal mediator, in an effort to shut down the nearly three-month strike by 3,200 workers at the company's defense plants in the St. Louis area. The workers, who build F-15 and F-18 fighter jets, drones and other weapons systems, have been on strike since August 4 over inadequate pay, extended wage progression and other issues.

The intervention of the federal government reflects the anxiety of the Trump administration to resume military production as quickly as possible. According to a report last month in the *Wall Street Journal*, US officials have told the arms industry in private meetings that it wants to see a doubling or even quadrupling of production for key missile systems.

At the same time, a mediator provides political cover for both Boeing and the IAM bureaucracy to impose a deal on workers that has already been worked out. That the strike has taken place at all is due to the repeated refusal of rank-and-file workers to accept a sellout deal. After workers rejected a third sellout deal in September, the IAM attempted to shut down the strike by "pre-ratifying" a deal which management had not agreed to. This, however, has failed for the time being.

The strike has already had a significant impact on Boeing's operations and the US military. On October 9, Gen. Kenneth Wilsbach, commander of the Pacific Air Forces, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that deliveries of the new F-15EX fighter jet have been delayed due to the walkout in St. Louis. Boeing was supposed to deliver 12 of the advanced F-15s by the end

of the year, but so far it has only handed over six.

At the same time, Boeing continues to receive the support of Wall Street. The company said on October 14 that it delivered 55 passenger jets in September, the most since 2018, putting it on track for its best year since the grounding of the 737 MAX after two fatal crashes in October 2018 and March 2019.

The strike is a major center of the class struggle in the US. The workers are facing both a massive defense contractor and behind it the Trump administration and the entire American ruling elite. Boeing plays a key role in arming US imperialism worldwide, including the US-NATO war in Ukraine against Russia and the Israeli genocide in Gaza. The strike thus objectively pits this section of the working class against the American war machine.

At the same time, the wars abroad are being brought home in the form of National Guard deployments to cities across the US. The Trump administration, operating on a strategy to establish a dictatorship, is reportedly deep in talks about invoking the Insurrection Act, which would be tantamount to imposing martial law.

Boeing workers are at a critical juncture. Boeing will not budge not only because it is backed by Wall Street and by the White House but because they can count on the IAM bureaucracy to help starve workers out. Workers are being strung out on \$200 a week in strike pay, while the union has done next to nothing to build support for the strike, including among the 30,000 Boeing airline workers in the Pacific Northwest.

Workers must break out of this isolation with a new strategy and new organization, starting with the formation of a Boeing St. Louis Workers Rank-and-File Committee, to formulate their demands and enforce those demands on the picket line and during the contract talks.

Such demands should include: \$1,000 a week in strike pay; workers' control over picketing and the organization of flying pickets to other sections of workers; measures to prevent the training of strikebreakers; appeals for solidarity strikes from machinists on the commercial side of Boeing, as well as from company engineers; and rank-and-file control over all talks to ensure that the fight is carried out to get workers what they need, not what the company or government claims can be afforded.

That there is significant latent support for the strike was shown by the fact that machinists in IAM District 751, which covers 33,000 Boeing machinists across Washington, Oregon and California, donated a collective \$32,000 to the strike fund for their brothers and sisters in St. Louis. At the same time, the donation highlights the refusal of the IAM leadership to properly provision the strike.

Instead, the IAM has focused on filing an Unfair Labor Practice charge against Boeing, which alleges that the company refused to provide information needed for bargaining and engaged in "bad faith" by unilaterally stripping workers of their health insurance.

This is no doubt true, but the complaint to the Trump-controlled National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) is a toothless gesture. The American federal government is not a neutral arbiter but the bulwark of capitalist class rule. The Trump administration is very keen on ensuring that its plans for war abroad and dictatorship at home continue unimpeded and is using the federal mediator to ensure those interests, which coincide with that of Boeing's executives, are dominant.

The aerospace giant is also well into the process of hiring strikebreakers to replace the skilled workers on the picket line. In an internal memo obtained by Reuters, a Boeing executive said the first batch of replacement workers began training on October 2 for munitions and aircraft assembly positions. The company is also looking at outsourcing work to third parties in an effort to break the strike.

The IAM responded by claiming that Boeing was bluffing, asserting that their highly technical jobs require months of training and that obtaining the security clearances needed for defense work can take up to six months. But this only demonstrates that Boeing, with the backing of the US military, is serious about doing whatever it takes to crush the strike and ramp up the production of bombs and fighter jets needed for global war.

The IAM's response also again demonstrates both the

unwillingness and inability of the bureaucracy to wage a serious fight. The rank and file must respond with a decisive break with the union apparatus and establish a new pole of opposition against the efforts by Boeing to starve them out.

This also involves breaking absolutely with the Democratic Party. Earlier this month, in a maneuver aimed at providing political cover for the union bureaucracy, a group of Democratic congressmen, led by "democratic socialist" Senator Bernie Sanders, issued an appeal to Boeing to "do the right thing" and "sign a fair contract."

This is nothing but a cynical stunt. The Democrats, no less than the Republicans, are committed to a massive military buildup against China and Russia and will not lift a finger to support workers fighting the Pentagon's contractors.

At the same time, the media has imposed an almost total blackout on the strike, which has been virtually ignored by the national television networks and major newspapers. This demonstrates the fear within the ruling class that the struggle of Boeing workers could become a catalyst for a much broader movement of the working class against declining living standards, the soaring cost of living and the drive to World War III.

That fear is well justified. Saturday's "No Kings" protests drew millions of people across thousands of locations internationally in cities and rural areas alike. There is mass opposition to the enormous social inequality that exists in American society and the fascist dictatorship Trump is erecting to maintain that inequality.

The only way forward for Boeing workers is to form the Boeing St. Louis Workers Rank-and-File Committee, independent of the pro-corporate IAM apparatus, to appeal for support from workers throughout Boeing and beyond and make their strike the starting point for a powerful counteroffensive by the working class. This must be combined with the building of a mass political movement of the working class to stop the drive to war and fight for a socialist alternative to the bankrupt capitalist system.



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