

Machinists union forces re-vote on Boeing concessions contract

Hector Cordon, Jerry White
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Overriding last November's resounding vote by 31,000 Boeing workers against a concessions-laden contract extension, the International Association of Machinists (IAM) has ordered another vote on essentially the same contract.

With the new vote, scheduled for January 3, the IAM is seeking to ram through the demands of the giant airplane manufacturer, which wants to eliminate company-paid pensions, impose higher healthcare costs on the workers in accordance with Obama's health care law and reduce wage increases. The deal would essentially eliminate workers' right to strike by imposing a ban on walkouts until the contract expires in 2024.

In the run up to the last vote, Boeing threatened to move construction of its new version of the 777 jetliner to a low-cost state and eliminate up to 20,000 jobs in the state of Washington and Oregon. Despite the blackmail—ceaselessly promoted by politicians, the media and the IAM—rank-and-file workers voted by a two-to-one margin to reject the deal. At meetings and lunchtime protests angry workers denounced IAM officials for selling them out.

Earlier this month, Boeing's top executives engaged in three days of discussions with IAM District 751 President Tom Wroblewski and so-called dissident elements in the local to see if the deal could be repackaged. Out of these discussions, Boeing offered a slightly revised contract proposal—adding \$5,000 to the signing bonus and retaining six years for new hires to reach top pay scale, instead of 22.

Meanwhile, IAM International President Tom Buffenbarger was involved in behind-the-scenes maneuvers with the company to impose a new vote. The ballot is being rammed through during the the holidays to assure that workers have as little time as

possible to study the details and organize opposition. At the same time, the IAM hopes to exploit the increased economic pressures on workers this time of year by offering a \$10,000 signing bonus.

An Everett, Washington Boeing worker Doug told the WSWS, “All I know is nothing, this is amazing! Both sides were saying the vote is off the table. My entire career in union shops I have never seen anything like this. Everything the company and union have done has been to blindside the ranks.”

Well aware of the deep hostility of rank-and-file workers, District 751 officials, including Wroblewski—who supported the first deal until he was forced to repudiate it in the face of mass opposition—have sought to distance themselves from the IAM International. A statement on the Washington state local's web site, said Buffenbarger “ordered the vote over objections of 751's elected officials,” adding, because of “massive takeaways, the Union is adamantly recommending members reject this offer.”

Nevertheless, the local officials write in capital letters, “THERE IS NO STOPPING THE VOTE.”

Despite their self-serving protestations, the local officials—who have no fundamental political differences with Buffenbarger & Co.—are complicit in this attack. While rank-and-file workers would undoubtedly throw out any International official who dared to show his faces in the union hall, the loyal oppositionists in the union local have not called for a boycott, let alone a break with the IAM. The last thing Wroblewski and the other local officials want is to encourage a full-scale rebellion against the IAM

Such a rebellion would generate popular support among workers throughout the US and threaten the long standing relations between the unions and corporate management, as well as the Obama

administration and the Democratic Party, which have made perpetual wage-cutting and health care cuts the lynchpin of their economic policy.

The forced re-vote is a damning exposure of the IAM, which has demonstrated once again that it is nothing more than a company union totally hostile to the democratic and social rights of the workers they supposedly “represent.” This poses before workers the necessity of building new organizations of struggle based on an entirely different perspective, which begins with the needs of the working class not the needs of the capitalist system and the corporate and financial aristocracy that profits from it.

Various pseudo-left groups, such as Labor Notes, Socialist Alternative, and the International Socialist Organization, are desperately seeking to block workers from drawing the necessary political lessons from decades of union betrayals. Increasingly assuming high-paid positions in the labor bureaucracy themselves and fearing the incipient opposition of workers to the Democratic Party, which they are aligned with, the pseudo-left groups seek to trap workers within these rotten organizations by peddling the lie that they can be reformed by pressure from below and the election of new leaders.

The betrayal of the unions—in the US and internationally—is not essentially the product of the corruption and cowardice of union leaders, however much of this exists. It is the result, instead of objective processes, above all the failure of nationally based labor organizations in the face of globalization and the ability of corporations to shift production to any location it can get cheaper labor.

Within the United States, the transformation of the unions into direct instruments of big business is the inevitable outcome of the anti-communist purges of the trade unions in the 1940s and 1950s, the political subordination of workers to the Democratic Party. The more that American capitalism has lost its once dominant position in one industry after another, the more the trade unions have sought to slash labor costs to boost the profits of the corporate and financial elite.

After decades of collaboration with management and betrayals, the union bureaucracy has escaped any control by rank-and-file workers. The continued maintenance of its bloated salaries and privileges (Buffenbarger, for example, pocketed \$304, 114 last

year) depends on suppressing all opposition to the dictates of big business.

Boeing workers must draw the necessary conclusions from this experience. A rejection of the latest sellout is necessary. But workers must understand that in the IAM—at the International and local level—they face an enemy just as ruthless as the corporations and the government. Boeing workers must take the conduct of their struggle out of the hands IAM, through the election of rank-and-file committees, and appeal to the working class throughout the US and internationally for a common struggle in defense of jobs and living standards. We urge Boeing workers to contact the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* to discuss and organize such a struggle.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)