

Tens of thousands of Boeing machinists vote to strike

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Do you work at Boeing? Tell us what you're demanding in the next contract by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

More than 33,000 machinists working at Boeing's facilities in Washington and Oregon packed into T-Mobile Park (home of the Seattle Mariners of Major League Baseball) on Wednesday and voted by 99.9 percent to strike the aerospace giant when their contract expires on September 12. The workers are members of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Engineers (IAM).

The vote reflects the mass sentiment among workers that their basic needs and demands are not being met. Their last contract was negotiated in 2008, the result of a 57-day long strike that was ultimately sold out by the union apparatus. The contract, which was ostensibly for just four years, was extended repeatedly starting in 2012. The last raise workers saw was a single 1 percent hike in 2014.

The vote is also a blow against the Biden administration and the US war machine. Boeing is a major defense contractor for the Department of Defense and is integral for American imperialism's war plans against Russia and China, along with the ongoing US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza. A strike at Boeing would significantly hinder these murderous campaigns.

A campaign team from the *World Socialist Web Site* distributed copies of a statement by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, "Boeing machinists: Vote YES to strike! Build rank-and-file committees to enforce the will of the membership!"

That statement declared:

The struggle at Boeing, a poster child for

corporate criminality, must become the tip of the spear of an offensive by the whole working class in defense of its interests.

It also called on workers to connect their fight for better pay and safety with the fight against war:

Boeing is a major defense contractor, which produces F-15 fighters, V-22 attack helicopters, and B-52 strategic bombers. A strike would deliver a powerful blow to the White House's ongoing support for Israel's genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza and American imperialism's rapidly expanding military confrontations against Russia and China.

The profit-driven cuts to safety which have led to countless accidents on Boeing passenger planes, the statement concluded, shows "management has lost the right to make these decisions." It concluded:

Workers, meanwhile, are not beholden to profit interests and know perfectly well how to build airplanes in a safe, high quality manner. They must insist that they have the final say over all aspects of production, enforced through the right to stop work if management attempts to make them work in an unsafe manner.

One worker, speaking to the WSWS as they entered the stadium, commented, "There's a tier system with

nine tiers. Starting pay is lower than what fast food workers get. You have to work six years to get top level pay. But nobody lasts that long because wages start so low.”

The starting salary of fast food workers in Seattle falls between \$27,000 and \$34,000 a year.

Several workers also noted the surging costs and the need for as broad a struggle as possible. “Cost of living is a serious problem because wages haven’t kept up,” said one. Another warned, “Boeing is trying to cut our retirement and pension.” And another said, “We need to strike for the next generation. We need people to hear our side, not the company’s side.”

Boeing, for its part, has pushed back on every demand, including pay as well as calls for better safety and quality control at the company’s plants. In a statement after the strike, it demanded that workers accept the “business realities we face as a company.”

Such business realities are of the company’s making, not its workers. Since the two deadly 737 MAX 8 crashes in 2018 and 2019, which killed 346 passengers and crew, Boeing has faced increased public scrutiny for its complete dismantling of any internal quality and safety checks.

The scrutiny intensified after a door blew out of a 737 MAX 9 in January, injuring 50 people. Since then, a slew of whistleblowers have emerged testifying to harassment and retaliation within the company for trying to raise safety and quality problems at Boeing or its suppliers. Two of the whistleblowers, John Barnett and Joshua Dean, have since died while bringing allegations against Boeing, both under extraordinarily suspicious circumstances.

One machinist commented to the WSWS, “Those two whistleblowers that died, that was a Boeing job.”

As a result of these increasingly public internal issues, Boeing’s stock has lost more than \$41 billion of its value since January. That has not stopped CEO David Calhoun, who is stepping down at the end of the year, from making \$32.8 million for his role at the company in 2023, a decision which was ratified by stockholders in May of this year.

At the same time, however, workers can place no trust that the IAM will in any way meet their demands. For example, the union’s call for a 40 percent wage increase is still well below what workers have lost over the past 16 years.

It’s also well below what workers need to survive in and around Seattle. The median rent in Everett, Washington, which is just north of Seattle and where the majority of these workers work, is \$1,976, while median rent in Seattle proper is \$2,197. If the current tier system is left in place, new hires would make around \$3150 a month before taxes, making Seattle and Everett essentially unlivable for these workers.

At minimum, workers need at least double the increase the union is proposing, both to make up for what has been lost and to be able to continue to live in and near the increasingly expensive Puget Sound area. Workers must also fight to abolish the tier system, which is designed to pit older and newer workers against one another, rather than their real class enemies, the company and the corporatist unions.

Workers must also have full control over quality and safety at Boeing. The past six years have shown that the company is focused far more on profits than it is on human lives. During the development of the lethal MAX 8 jetliner, Boeing invested 92 percent of its cash flow to stock buybacks for its investors, all of which should have gone to proper testing and development on the new plane.

Such demands immediately raise the need for workers’ control over production as a whole. While the IAM declares that, “We don’t want to strike,” and that it wants to “change this company and to save it from itself,” workers know that Boeing cannot be reformed. It is a microcosm of the capitalist system as a whole, historically outmoded and sending humanity to oblivion.

A genuine fight must come from the independent initiative of workers themselves. Rank-and-file committees must be formed at every workplace, large and small. They must reach out to other sections of workers, including East Coast dockworkers also set to strike in September and prepare mass industrial action as part of the struggle to end war and the capitalist system which engenders such destruction.



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