

Overriding strike vote by 33,000 Boeing workers, IAM bureaucrats schedule vote on non-existent contract

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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 at Boeing's factories in Washington and Oregon are poised to strike after their contract expires on September 12. The workers, who are members of International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) Local 751, voted 99.9 percent to strike in a mass meeting in July, with approximately 85 percent of the membership participating.

Workers are determined to claw back the massive wage and benefits losses over the past decade and a half. Workers have not received a pay raise in a decade and have been under the same contract for an incredible 16 years, following a 57-day long strike in 2008. They are also outraged over continuous cuts to safety protocols which have led to a series of high-profile disasters on the company's 737-MAX aircraft.

With major showdowns on the East Coast docks, on the railroads, in major school districts and other workplaces, the potential exists for Boeing workers to help build a united movement of the working class.

But workers are in a fight not just against Boeing, but against the company's stooges in the IAM bureaucracy. Between now and September 12, workers must prepare by organizing themselves independently in rank-and-file committees, in order to enforce the democratic decision which they made in July.

Sham vote being prepared

The IAM bureaucracy has claimed that it is prepared to call a strike. They are only saying this in order to get in front of workers' anger. In reality, they already have a deal worked out which they are preparing to ram through in a sham vote.

According to contract "updates" on the IAM's website, a vote has already been scheduled for September 12. Workers are being asked to vote on a "contract" which, officially, does not

exist. The IAM claims that they remain far apart from Boeing on key issues, including wages. Moreover, according to statements from Boeing, talks are scheduled to continue right up until September 12.

What this means is that Boeing workers will be forced to vote on September 12 on a contract which will have been finalized at the last minute, before workers have had time to review it.

What is worse, the IAM is prepared to even override a "no" vote to enforce the contract. The ballot, a sample of which has been posted online, contains two items: first, on the contract, and second, on whether to strike.

The IAM does not explain why it is asking for a second vote for strike authorization after workers already voted by 99.9 percent in July. But this is made clear in a disclaimer, which reads: "If a majority of members vote to reject the contract but less than two-thirds vote to strike, the contract is accepted by default."

In other words, if a 65 percent majority of voters cast ballots against the contract and the same number cast ballots in favor of a strike vote, then the contract is "ratified."

The IAM bureaucracy claims that it is calling for everyone to vote to strike regardless of whether they approve the contract. But this is only to disclaim responsibility for the undemocratic loophole which they themselves have laid out. The obvious impact of this confusing, unnecessary procedure is to create a scenario where an overwhelming majority "no" vote is simply discarded.

This recalls the infamous contract vote at UPS in 2018, where the Teamsters bureaucracy overrode a "no" vote by citing a similar undemocratic clause requiring a two-thirds majority to reject a deal if turnout is below 50 percent.

The IAM is following not only the Teamsters playbook from 2018, but also from 2023. Last year, Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien falsely claimed he was prepared to call a strike at UPS, in order to create the impression that the contract they had worked out was the product of a "credible strike threat." Since then, thousands of UPS workers have lost their jobs.

This is only the latest in a series of betrayals by the IAM

bureaucracy. They have helped impose the current contract for 16 years through repeated extensions, first in 2012, and then for another 10 years in 2014.

Workers have not seen a wage increase since the 2014 extension. At the time, Boeing had threatened to move production of its 777 model out of Washington state, while the union helped the company force workers to give up their company-paid pensions.

The IAM claimed that workers agreed to this by a vote of 51 percent to 49 percent, a margin of just 600 votes. Despite dozens of complaints lodged about irregularities in that vote, the National Labor Relations Board upheld the results and the imposition of the rotten contract extension.

This is a serious warning to Boeing workers that they must prepare now to countermand this dirty tricks campaign. Workers must organize themselves to demand:

First, that their strike vote be respected, and that a strike be called if they have not approved a deal by the end of September 12;

Second, that no contract be put to a vote before they have had adequate time to study the full text, and not just self-serving highlights; and

Third, that the contract can be rejected by a simple majority. Workers must also demand the right to have rank-and-file oversight over the balloting process to prevent any more irregularities.

“Saving Boeing from itself” versus public ownership

The new contract is being put forward amid the deepest crisis in the history of the company. A campaign of corporate cost-cutting has led to a series of fatal and near-fatal accidents, with the most recent round of scandals starting with a door-plug blowout on a 737-MAX 9 jetliner in January.

Meanwhile, the mysterious deaths of whistleblowers John Barnett and Joshua Dean have highlighted the complete lawlessness of corporate America. Boeing’s criminal negligence has even expanded into outer space, with two astronauts stranded on the International Space Station by major malfunctions on their Boeing spacecraft.

With Boeing’s stock in free-fall, IAM District 751 President Jon Holden has declared that the union needs to be “included” in Boeing’s “vision for the future” and that “we have to save this company from itself.” What this means is that the union bureaucracy’s top priority is returning the company to profitability.

They claim that this can be done through a corporatist “partnership” between management and workers. But the way in which they are attempting to ram through a sellout deal shows that “saving” Boeing on a capitalist basis can only be

carried out by making workers pay for the cost of the crisis.

Boeing is also a critical defense contractor. The White House can ill afford a strike which would jeopardize the proxy war in Ukraine, the genocide in Gaza and other criminal wars.

The Biden/Harris administration is working closely with the union bureaucrats to secure the “home front,” summed up in Biden’s recent declaration that the AFL-CIO is “my domestic NATO.” There can be no doubt that the White House is in close talks with Boeing and the IAM to head off a strike.

In fact, in its September 3 contract update, the IAM met with acting Labor Secretary Julie Su, “giving her a clear picture of where we stand.” Su was instrumental in rapidly brokering a sellout deal on the West Coast docks to prevent a strike, after workers began taking wildcat actions in defiance of being left on the job for a year without a contract.

The real issue is not restoring Boeing’s stock prices, but its transformation into a public utility under the control of the working class. Both workers on the shop floor and Boeing engineers know how to build safe planes. The only obstacle has been the profit motive of Boeing executives and its wealthy shareholders. Their control must be removed and the company reorganized under workers’ control to operate in the interests of society

On this basis, freed from having to finance dividends, share buybacks and other useless expenditures, it will also be possible to guarantee high wages and good working conditions for all.

Above all, the fight at Boeing is an international struggle. Dockworkers, railroad workers, teachers and others are fighting against corporate criminality in their own workplaces, as well as betrayals by union bureaucrats. Boeing workers must make an appeal for a broader movement, including joint actions uniting workers across industries organized by the rank and file, not by the apparatus.

This means above all the building of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, which includes committees all over the world fighting two-front wars against management and union sellouts, as a coordinating center for working class opposition.



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