

# “New-hires, old hires, retirees, we’re sticking together for a common goal”: Boeing machinists explain what is at stake in their strike

**Bryan Dyne**  
14 September 2024

*Join the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee to take up the fight for workers’ control! Text (406) 414-7648 or email [boeingworkersrfc@gmail.com](mailto:boeingworkersrfc@gmail.com). Alternatively, fill out the form at the bottom of this article to be put in touch.*

The first day of the strike of 33,000 Boeing machinists in the states of Washington, Oregon and California has shown the tremendous power of the working class. Workers walked out just after midnight on Friday morning after rejecting by almost 95 percent a sellout contract backed by the International Association of Machinists (IAM) leadership and voting by 96 percent to strike.

The strike is a blow against the aerospace giant, which is seeking to push the costs of its ongoing crisis onto the backs of the workers. It is also a repudiation of the IAM bureaucracy, which worked in lockstep with the corporation and the Biden-Harris administration to try and prevent a walkout against a key US exporter and major defense contractor.

Boeing machinists are expressing the true feelings of workers across the country and around the world. There is enormous opposition within the working class to the assault on living standards, the increase of social inequality and attacks on basic social rights. The stand taken by Boeing workers is giving a voice to these sentiments.

Workers on the picket line described the impact of the soaring cost of living in the Seattle area to *World Socialist Web Site* reporters, and explained how this situation had been worsened by more than a decade of contract extensions pushed through by the IAM. They also spoke about the complete abandonment of quality and safety standards by Boeing management, especially in the aftermath of the 1997 merger between Boeing and defense contractor McDonnell Douglas.

“I made more money in the Army,” a young worker recently hired by Boeing told WSWS reporters. “McDonald’s makes more. Aldi’s makes more. Rent in the Seattle area is roughly \$3-\$4,000 for a single family home. I don’t know how anyone can afford to live here. We definitely can’t.” He continued, “New hires, old hires, retirees, we’re sticking together for a common goal and that’s better quality of life for each of us and our families.”

The connection between different generations of Boeing workers

is especially important in the context of the 2014 contract extension, pushed through in a sham vote held by the IAM that sacrificed workers’ pensions. In the months leading up to the vote, workers recalled that Boeing hired 10,000 new-hires and promised them signing bonuses if they helped ratify the contract. Afterwards, recalled one worker, “half were let go before they got their bonus, and the union didn’t do anything about it.”

Today, however, young workers are solidly behind the strike. “I grew up in the area hearing that Boeing was such a great job,” one new-hire told WSWS reporters. “But now that I’m here I can hardly pay my bills. Housing costs are impossible.” The worker said the strike was launched by the rank-and-file workers themselves, not the IAM leadership. “The workers spoke and showed the union leadership that we weren’t going to take this,” he said.

A veteran worker, who has been through four strikes at Boeing going back to 1989, explained the steep fall in real income workers have suffered due to IAM-backed concessionary contracts over the past three decades.

“I haven’t had a pay raise in 10 years. My buying power is less now than in 1992. When I hired in, I made about two-and-a-half times minimum wage. Maxed out people made about four times minimum wage.

“Now, people are hiring in at minimum wage, and our max out is only about two times or two-and-a-half times minimum wage. Our buying power has shrunk by a huge amount.”

Commenting on Boeing’s profit-driven exploitation of workers, he continued, “People should not have to have a full time job building jets and still struggle the way we do... And the company looks at us if we’re disposable. We’re not disposable.”

The worker also commented on degraded safety and quality standards at Boeing and its supplier Spirit AeroSystems (first spun off by Boeing and then bought back) that led to the mid-flight door blowout during an Alaska Airlines flight in January.

“You know, that was a disgusting thing to have happened. But I guarantee that when they’ve looked and evaluated that problem, that problem came from years earlier. The mechanic that [removed the door plugs] was doing what he was told by management. ...

The deeper you drill down, you're going to find out that this has been something that's been the status quo."

Another worker said, "We were sold out by the old leadership under the contract extension, and then they said that those leaders were ousted. But when it came time for this contract, it turned into 'new boss, same as the old boss.'"

Several workers spoke angrily about the lavish new headquarters being built for IAM District 751 officials just outside the plant. At the same time, the IAM is only offering \$250 a week for strike pay, and only beginning on the third week of the strike in an attempt to starve workers out and get them ultimately to agree to a second concessions contract.

On the eve of the contract vote, a group of militant workers founded the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee to organize opposition to the sellout contract and fight to transfer power and decision-making from the IAM apparatus to shopfloor workers.

In its founding statement, the committee declared:

The first step is to send this contract into the garbage. But we must take matters into our own hands. We can't waste any time on wishful thinking that a "no" vote will "force" the IAM bureaucrats to hear us. They won't be won over because their bread is buttered on the other side.

Several rank-and-file committee members told the WWS that union officials had done nothing to prepare for a strike, and that IAM District 751 President Jon Holden and other officials were shocked and visibly dismayed by the near unanimous rejection of their deal and vote to strike. On the first day of the walkout, they said, District 751 officials did not deploy pickets to several gates at the Everett plant.

"They don't want to pay out any strike benefits, so I'm sure they are going to try to bring us back another deal before the third week," one member said. The committee has called for full strike benefits to be paid out immediately, to be funded by the IAM's \$300 million in assets.

In the aftermath of the massive repudiation of the IAM-backed deal, District 751 President Holden said the union would survey the members to see what their concerns with the contract were. This is nothing but a cynical ploy.

The contract brought back met none of the workers' demands, including a 40 percent pay increase and the restoration of pensions. The purpose of a survey is to gather information so the union bureaucracy and the company can add a few pennies here and there and repackage the deal as something that workers demanded.

The maneuvers by the IAM apparatus are being carried out in close collaboration with the Biden-Harris administration, as evidenced by the meeting last week between Holden and Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su. The Democratic Party, as well as Donald Trump and the Republicans, are fully behind Boeing, which is a major supplier of fighters, bombers and missiles for American imperialism's war drive against Iran, Russia and China.

In contrast to the two corporate-controlled parties, Socialist Equality Party vice presidential candidate Jerry White visited workers on the picket lines and issued a statement calling on all workers to support the revolt by rank-and-file Boeing workers.

We are two months away from a presidential election in which both candidates, Trump and Kamala Harris, are totally hostile to the interests of the working class. Trump is promoting fascistic attacks on immigrant workers, seeking to divide workers along ethnic and racial lines.

Yet on the picket lines at Boeing, workers of virtually every nationality are united in a common class fight to defend their interests.

As for Kamala Harris and the Democrats, they are fixated on the expanding global wars of American imperialism. From the genocide in Gaza to the wars against Russia and China, which threaten to erupt in nuclear war.

This strike shows enormous power of the working class. But workers cannot leave this in the hands of the IAM leaders, who will conspire with the Biden-Harris administration to wear down workers and force them to vote on another sellout contract.

Workers here have formed a rank-and-file committee, so that decision-making and power can be in the hands of the workers on the shop floor. So that Boeing workers can unite with Washington state workers, teachers, longshore workers, railroad workers, autoworkers, with Airbus workers in Europe, all who are facing the same fight.

In the wake of Tuesday's "debate" between Trump and Harris and the ongoing lurch to the right by both parties, White said, the Boeing strike has the potential to be the beginning of a counter-offensive by the working class against inequality, dictatorship and war. As White noted, the struggle can only be won if the rank-and-file workers control it.

That is why a section of Boeing workers have stepped forward to form the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee, to warn workers of the efforts to wear down the strike and ram through another sellout contract. The committee also made clear that the only way forward for Boeing workers is to "turn our struggle into a movement of the whole working class, who are fighting for the same issues we are."

*To contact the committee, text (406) 414-7648 or email [boeingworkersrfc@gmail.com](mailto:boeingworkersrfc@gmail.com). Alternatively, fill out the form at the bottom of this article to be put in touch.*



To contact the WWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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