

After defeating the IAM sellout, the rank and file must control the Boeing strike!

The Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee
15 September 2024

Thirty-three thousand Boeing workers walked out on strike Friday morning after massively rejecting a four-year contract proposal recommended by the International Association of Machinists. Workers in the state of Washington, Oregon and California are striking the giant aerospace and defense company to demand substantial wage increases to make up for more than a decade without a raise and restore company-paid pensions.

On the eve of the contract vote, a group of militant workers founded the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee to oppose the sabotage of their struggle by the IAM bureaucracy and to transfer decision making and power from the union apparatus to shopfloor workers.

With the strike entering its first full week, the rank-and-file committee issued the following statement spelling out the issues workers now confront.

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

Brothers and Sisters,

The strike at Boeing that rank-and-file workers began last week, from new hires to veteran workers, was a powerful show of unity against both corporate management and the IAM leadership which brought us this sellout contract.

There has been a great deal of elation on the picket lines that after all these years of contract extensions that have eaten up our wages and robbed our pensions that we are finally fighting back.

Workers have the right to be proud, but enthusiasm is not enough to win this battle. As the new week starts, rank-and-file workers have to take stock of situation, carefully assess the counter-measures being prepared by the company, the US government, and the IAM bureaucracy, and keep the initiative in the hands of the membership. For this to happen, we have to outline a strategy to defend our interests just as ruthlessly as our class enemies seek to defend theirs.

In a strike update on Friday, the IAM negotiating committee declared, “Thursday’s overwhelming vote was a sign of our unity” and that they are proud of us.

Who do they think they are kidding?

The vote demonstrated the unity of the rank and file against the sellouts in the union apparatus, not unity with the leadership which tried to ram this garbage down our throats. IAM District 751 President Jon Holden was visibly shaken and discouraged when he read the results of the vote last week. That is because all the old buttons the union bureaucracy used to sell its past contracts, especially trying to bribe new hires with signing bonuses, failed miserably this time.

Instead, the young workers who are being hired in at wages that are less than McDonald’s and Aldi’s, and who took pay cuts to work at Boeing because they were promised a better future, decisively voted “no.” That is because they cannot afford to rent an apartment, let alone buy a home, or raise a family. They came together with veteran workers who have not seen a raise in more than a decade and said with one voice: “We’re not going to take this anymore!”

The negotiating committee update then said: “Confidence is high as Members take control of the next phase of reaching our goals.”

But a few sentences later they say the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Services (FMCS) is intervening in the negotiation and that the IAM is scheduled to meet with FMCS and the company this week.

Sorry, Mr. Holden and friends, we are not fools. The federal mediators are not neutral. The Biden-Harris administration, no less than Trump and the Republicans, are bought and paid for by Boeing. Two years ago, the President and the Democrats and Republicans in Congress voted to outlaw a strike by 110,000 railroad workers and impose a pro-company contract on them, which the workers had rejected.

At the time, the corporate-controlled politicians said that a strike by railroad workers would disrupt the US economy and endanger “national security.” If they stripped railroad workers of the right to strike on those grounds, we would be fools to think they are not planning to do that to us.

Boeing is a major military supplier and the US government

does not want any disruption of critical military deliveries to Israel, Ukraine and other countries.

The claim by the Boeing bosses, the IAM leaders and the federal mediators that a “win-win” agreement can be reached is total nonsense. This is not just a contract fight. It is a clash of opposing forces whose interests are irreconcilable. In such a case, the victor is determined by who can bring the most powerful forces to the battle.

Boeing is a giant corporation whose corporate executives and shareholders are part of the corporate-financial oligarchy that rules America. For decades, they have been waging war on the working class. The present more and more resembles the Gilded Age, when the Rockefellers, Morgans, Goulds and other robber barons ruled over their wage slaves with an iron fist. The only difference is that the concentration of wealth and power of the oligarchy is exponentially greater today.

On the other hand is the working class, which produces all the wealth of society. Our strike is part of the growing resistance of workers throughout America and the world who will not accept the new normal of being the working poor. With our overwhelming vote to reject this contract and to strike, we are speaking not just for ourselves but for millions.

The IAM officials want to relegate us to being extras in a movie they are directing. According to them, our only role is to “provide additional input to the bargaining committee” by filling out a survey, so union officials can supposedly “represent your interests effectively.”

If we leave it up to them, the IAM leaders and Boeing will move a few pennies here and there and force us to vote on a repackaged deal that is essentially the same as the one we just rejected.

For us to win, the membership must really take control of the next phase of the struggle. We formed the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee because we recognize the enormous power of workers on the shop floor and understand the need for rank-and-file workers, not the IAM bureaucracy, to control this struggle. Only in this way can we fight for and win what we need, not what the company, government and union bureaucrats say is affordable.

Every worker must be engaged in this fight, not simply on the picket lines, but in determining what our demands are. Our committee has outlined a set of demands, which we believe should be adopted by workers as the minimum of what we will accept.

We will not ratify a contract unless it includes:

- An inflation-busting 50 percent pay increase, plus COLA retroactive to 2014, tied to prices in the Seattle area.
- The restoration of the fully company-paid pension for all workers.

- No probationary clause for employees, which gives Boeing the ability to hire and fire new workers at will.
- No mandatory overtime.
- Sharply reduced health insurance premiums.
- Rank-and-file control of production standards, quality and safety.

To achieve this, we propose the following:

- No closed-door discussions between the IAM, Boeing, the federal mediators and the Biden-Harris administration. All negotiations to be live-streamed and to include rank-and-file observers, elected from workers on the shopfloor.

- Immediate and retroactive strike pay of \$750 a week. This strike fund belongs to the membership not the union bureaucrats. The IAM has \$300 million in assets, hundreds of millions in Wall Street investment and pays out \$4.4 million in salaries to its top officers, including \$668,000 to IAM chief Robert Martinez in 2023. In addition, the IAM spent \$3.3 million on “lobbying” the corporate-controlled Democrats and Republicans. These resources must be used to sustain workers for the type of struggle necessary to fight this giant corporation.

- We cannot win this struggle alone. The strike must be expanded to all sections of Boeing workers, including the engineers in SPEEA and non-union workers at the South Carolina plant. Informational pickets should be sent to win support from dockworkers, railroaders, Washington state employees, healthcare workers, education workers.

- A special campaign to reach airline workers internationally at Air Canada and Airbus.

There is enormous popular support for our fight, including from United Airlines pilots. But this must be mobilized, and our struggle turned into a powerful counter-offensive by the whole working class to secure the rights we deserve.

If you agree with this, then join us! Contact us to continue the fight for rank-and-file control by texting (406) 414-7648.



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