

“I support the strike 100 percent”

Airline workers speak out in support of strike by 33,000 Boeing machinists

Bryan Dyne
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On Sunday, September 22, at 2:00 p.m. Pacific/5:00 p.m. Eastern, the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee is holding an online meeting to mobilize the broadest support in the working class for the 33,000 striking Boeing machinists. Register for the event by clicking here.

The strike by 33,000 Boeing machinists across Washington, Oregon and California is in its sixth day, and the mood of workers on the picket line remains militant. It has been nearly a week since the rank and file soundly rejected a sellout agreement endorsed by the leadership of the International Association of Machinists (IAM), and the workers remain confident that they can win their demands.

The machinists are wary on the intervention of a federal mediator and have little confidence that the IAM bureaucracy will bring back anything more than a slightly altered version of the contract that they rejected by 95 percent last week. Workers who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* say they are prepared to stay out on strike and will vote down any contract the IAM brings back that does not meet their needs.

“We are going to continue to strike even if they come back with a few pennies more. We went on strike for a reason,” a member of the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee told the WSWS. “I don’t think we’re going to cave. We’ve already caved for 16 years. The cost of living is outrageous out here.

“Boeing doesn’t care about safety. All they care about is getting those planes out the door. They should have seen this coming when we voted to strike by 99.9 percent in July. And now they act all surprised.”

Workers are determined, but they cannot fight this massive corporation, backed to the hilt by both big business parties, on their own.

A statement released earlier this week by the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee declared, “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.”

The demands of Boeing workers—at least a 40 percent raise to

combat inflation, maintaining their yearly bonus, improved healthcare and the restoration of pensions—echo among all workers who have faced decades of slashed wages and declining living standards.

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with airline workers in Seattle about their thoughts on the machinists’ strike. An American Airlines pilot said, “I support the strike 100 percent. The management at Boeing has been out of control for decades, and it’s time for them to pay back the givebacks that were given to the company since the merger with McDonnell Douglas and taking their pensions.”

He continued, “The whole country is sick of it. You can barely get by. New hires are making \$18 an hour. That’s McDonald’s wages to work on nearly supersonic airplanes. It’s not right. That’s the corporate greed in this country. And then Boeing threatens to take more production out of Washington and build the next airplane in another state.”

The pilot said that as a child he marched with his father during the Continental Airlines strike in 1983, just two years after Reagan fired 13,000 striking air traffic controllers. “You had corporate raiders like Frank Lorenzo then bankrupting the airlines and robbing pensions. Boeing is doing the same thing today.”

An operations engineer at the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (Sea-Tac) added, “It doesn’t seem legal that Boeing took away the pensions. I mean, a big reason to work at a place like Boeing is for the pension and the medical insurance. It makes sense they would go on strike for those.

“I’m an engineer, and we’re pretty important for the infrastructure of the airport. And it’s written into our contract that we can’t strike because the powers that be say we’re essential workers. And isn’t that convenient?”

An American Airlines flight attendant told WSWS reporters, “I support the Boeing workers and wish them luck in this strike. I lost my pension too, just like the Boeing workers. With almost 40 years I don’t have a pension anymore. In the 1990s they also undermined our healthcare benefits.

“The CEOs of America are making huge amounts of money that none of us will ever see. We don’t need to be millionaires,

but we need our fair share. It is wonderful that the rank and file took the lead in this fight. It's crazy that the workers are not getting what they need.

"They use the Railway Labor Act to prevent us from striking. It would be important for all workers to fight back together and support the Boeing workers, that would be real solidarity. That's what we need. It had to come from below."

In August, flight attendants at Alaska Airlines overwhelmingly rejected a supposed "historic" contract reached under federal mediation and recommended by the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA. Similar to Boeing workers, Alaska flight attendants have been working under contract extensions since 2014, with only nominal raises and the rejected the union-backed offer, which only included a 24 percent pay increase.

On the picket line at the Boeing facility in Renton, Washington, a young worker said, "All workers should support our strike. We're fighting for what everyone deserves: a livable wage. Nowadays, it's not easy to make a living anymore. People can't buy houses anymore. Can you blame anyone who is fighting for all these causes? This is for everyone."

Boeing executives and the IAM leaders "called the proposal a 'historic offer,'" she said. "When I heard that, I asked how is that 'historic?' We've suffered 10 years of essentially a wage freeze and lost our pensions. I don't even understand why the president of the union was pushing for us to say yes to the contract, because they clearly knew a lot of stuff was getting taken out.

"And how could Boeing lay off so many people over the last several years while everyone on top are still getting their bonuses? How can you say there's no money when all of the executives get all this money? Where did they pull that out and how could you not pull it out for the people?"

"Even normal groceries aren't that cheap anymore. How can anyone live with the minimum wage that's being offered. Even with a 25 percent raise, that's not enough. It's very unfair. Can you blame anyone trying to fight this?"

In opposition to the conspiracy between the IAM leaders, Boeing and the federal government, the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee is fighting for workers on the shop floor to take control of the strike, an end to the closed-door "negotiations," and the immediate payment of \$750 a week in strike benefits. The committee is fighting to break the isolation of the strike imposed by the IAM bureaucracy and to unite with all sections of workers to win their fight.

Socialist Equality Party vice presidential candidate Jerry White visited the picket line in Renton on Wednesday and posted the following statement on his X/Twitter account:

The meetings between the IAM leadership, Boeing execs and Biden's federal mediators are nothing but Kabuki theater. These are not "negotiations" between

antagonist parties but a conspiracy against rank-and-file workers. The only thing being discussed in the downtown Seattle hotel is how to wear down the resistance of the strikers and break their will to fight.

The concern of the Biden-Harris administration is, above all, that the strike at Boeing will impede the war aims of his administration, including the US-backed Israeli genocide of Gaza, the escalation of the US-NATO war against Russia and the growing conflict with China. All of this is highly dependent on war materiel produced by Boeing. Right now, the White House is relying on the IAM bureaucracy to starve workers into submission. But if IAM District 751 President Jon Holden & Co. fail to do so, the president will not hesitate to use strikebreaking measures in the name of defending "national security."

All workers have a stake in the outcome of this strike. The isolation of the struggle by the IAM and AFL-CIO leaders must be broken. Rank-and-file Boeing workers must send delegations to work places where they can reach airline, port, railroad, auto, education and other workers and call for joint demonstrations and other actions to win their battle.

I endorse the call by the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee for all workers to attend this Sunday's meeting to organize this fight.

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