

Boeing machinist denounces company's "Best and Final" offer

Bryan Dyne
25 September 2024

Join the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee. To get more information, text (406) 414-7648, email boeingworkersrfc@gmail.com or fill out the form at the end of this article.

The "Best and Final Contract Offer" from Boeing sent directly to 33,000 striking machinists on Monday has provoked broad outrage from workers on the picket line. The contract includes only a slight increase in pay compared to the previous contract and an increased signing bonus compared to the first.

These are largely the only differences from the deal brought back by the International Association of Machinists leadership on September 12, which rank-and-file workers voted down by 95 percent, precipitating the walkout the next day.

Boeing originally demanded that workers vote on the new offer by September 27. The company has since reportedly backed down from that hard deadline, giving the IAM bureaucracy additional time to wear down resistance and ram through the contract.

IAM leaders claimed they had not negotiated the new deal and that the company circumvented the union by sending the offer directly to the membership. In a strike update, the IAM District 751 Union Negotiating Team said, "The only way to resolve this strike is through negotiations, and rest assured, your Union will not bargain through the media."

The claim that IAM officials were blind-sided is hard to believe, given the fact that they were engaged in closed-door negotiations with Boeing and a federal mediator for days. It is just as likely that the IAM bureaucracy gave Boeing the go-ahead to put out a second offer to test the waters and see how workers would react to it.

IAM District 751 officials took nine hours to publicly respond to the offer Monday. During this time, they received a torrent of opposition from rank-and-file workers, making it clear the new deal would be overwhelmingly rejected like the first one. Only then did IAM officials announce that "we will not be voting on the 27th."

On Wednesday, IAM officials said they would renew negotiations with Boeing and the federal mediator on Friday. The Biden administration is hell-bent on shutting down the Boeing strike as soon as possible, given that the company is a major military supplier for Israel, Ukraine and the US itself.

The White House also fears that the continued resistance of Boeing workers to the company and the union bureaucracy will bolster the determination of 45,000 dockworkers to strike 36 ports on the East and Gulf coasts when their contract expires on October 1.

In the aftermath of the offer's release, the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with one of the striking machinists on her thoughts on the contract offer and the union leadership's response. Her identity has been concealed to protect her from both corporate and union retaliation.

"When we first got the email, my phone began blowing up. Mostly everyone was saying no and from the few yeses I was getting, they were worried that if we reject this offer that they won't come back with another offer until November. And that it will be exactly the same."

Workers are in particular concerned, she said, that they and their families will not be able to endure a long walkout with only \$250 a week in strike pay, which only begins this Friday.

As a result, she said, "A lot of people have started work at other places. I'm supposed to start work on Thursday out-of-state at another union job." Other Boeing workers have also taken jobs for DoorDash, Uber and other "gig" jobs, starting as early as September 12, the day of the vote to reject the initial contract.

She also noted a new antidemocratic voting policy by the union leadership that punishes workers who have had to look outside the Seattle area for work during the strike. "I called the union hall and asked about absentee ballots to vote since I will be out of state. They said vote is in-person only! Since when? This is a new policy, and I am so mad right now. We always had absentee ballots before."

As for the IAM's delayed response to Boeing's new offer, the worker continued, "I think they took a wait-and-see approach to see what our response would be, especially watching social media. They know we aren't stupid and that it was easy to predict that in the next offer, Boeing might make the general wage increase a little bit better and the ratification bonus a little bit better.

"And another point, Boeing matches 12 percent to the 401k for their salaried people. Why should we accept 8 percent?"

She continued, "I did see that they put back the AMPP

(Aerospace Machinists Performance Program) bonus and took the 401k with the union off the table, which was stupid in the first place. Why would we have wanted to have two 401ks? Overall, if this did get brought to a vote, I definitely think it would get rejected.”

The worker also spoke about Boeing’s attempt to bribe new hires and younger workers with the \$6,000 signing bonus. “Before this, all our ratification bonuses were \$10,000 and \$15,000. Our last ratification was \$10,000, but our bonus in 2008 was \$15,000. I’ve already sent off text messages to the young folks letting them know. I think we can hold out for what we want.”

She also said the minor improvements in the second offer exposed the lie from the IAM leadership that workers wouldn’t be able to “achieve more in a strike.”

“Workers showed their power. Now the company is losing something like \$50 to \$100 million a day.” A report in *Fortune* also notes that production of all Boeing 737 aircraft, the largest driver of the company’s sales, halted on Wednesday as a result of the strike. The aerospace giant is expected to suffer \$3.5 billion in revenue losses through the end of September.

“Really, they just want this thing to get wrapped up, especially with the Textron strike that just started,” referring to the 5,000 machinists in Wichita, Kansas, who went on strike Monday after overwhelmingly rejecting a contract recommended by IAM District 70 officials. “The IAM, they don’t want to pay out a penny of the strike fund, that why it’s very possible they will call another vote soon.”

The veteran worker continued, “I also think it was kind of funny that [IAM District 751 President] Jon Holden turned into a ghost right after the vote. He wasn’t on the picket lines, and he wasn’t out there supporting us. He only showed up after [IAM International President Robert] Martinez showed up for a photo op. Their agenda is very self-serving. Our union leadership doesn’t make us. We proved it when we voted the tentative agreement down by 96 percent.

“It’s not our first rodeo. We’ve also dealt with arbitrators before. We had a long strike back in 1977, 1989 and 2008. We’ve stood the line and didn’t care about the threats. There were a lot of sacrifices made.”

In 2014, Boeing and the IAM leadership dangled a signing bonus before a large influx of new hires and held a snap vote over the winter holidays to force through a contract extension, which eliminated company-paid pensions in a controversial 51-49 percent vote. The same tactics did not work in the most recent vote, with workers of all generations solidly opposed to the IAM-backed pro-company agreement.

“I’m really proud of our younger workers for not being bought like in 2014. They weren’t as educated then as they are now. If Boeing had its way, the strike would be over Friday.”

The Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which was formed by militant workers before the first contract vote, has issued a new statement entitled “Reject Boeing’s blackmail

threats! Mobilize all workers to win our strike!” It in particular stresses the need for rank-and-file machinists to break the isolation of the strike imposed by the IAM bureaucracy.

The statement declares in part:

[W]e must directly communicate with other workers engaged in similar struggles and organize mass demonstrations and joint job actions. This includes Alaska Airlines flight attendants, who voted to reject the contract brought back by their union last month; striking Textron Aviation workers in Kansas who voted down an IAM-backed contract like ours; railroad workers fighting the elimination of jobs and one-man crews; and Seattle teachers fighting school closures. Dockworkers in Seattle and Tacoma want to stop handling containers with Boeing parts, and 45,000 East Coast dockers have a contract expiring on September 30.

The unification of all workers will not be done by the union bureaucrats but by rank-and-file workers, networking with each other, sending informational pickets to each other’s workplaces, and building a powerful movement to fight to win what we need to survive. We should take a page out of history of the labor movement by looking at what workers in Seattle did in 1919, when 65,000 workers in the city went out on strike to defend 35,000 shipbuilding workers fighting to restore wages lost to wartime pay cuts.

Join the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee. To get more information, text (406) 414-7648, email boeingworkersrfc@gmail.com or fill out the form below.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact