

# IAM leaders work with Boeing and federal mediator to shut down strike as official "talks" resume

Bryan Dyne  
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The next round of closed door negotiations between International Association of Machinists (IAM) leaders, Boeing and federal mediator resume Friday with all parties looking to shut down the powerful strike and impose another pro-company contract on 33,000 Boeing machinists. The walkout began on September 13 after a rank-and-file revolt against the first IAM-backed proposal, with workers rejecting the contract by 95 percent and voting to strike by 96 percent.

From the perspective of the rank and file, the entire "negotiating" process is illegitimate. Boeing has drawn its line in the sand, particularly in regards to rejecting workers' demands to restore company-paid pensions, which were stolen from them in 2014.

What is being discussed between the parties is how best to break the resistance of workers and impose a contract dictated by Boeing executives and their wealthy shareholders.

The IAM leadership has kept the membership in the dark about the specifics of what is being discussed on a day-to-day basis, only providing updates that are essentially fluff pieces, cynically claiming, for example, "The time for real change is now."

It's telling that the only real news about the negotiations up to now has come from the capitalist news outlets like the *Wall Street Journal*, which noted that "union leaders" are "acknowledging they likely would need to compromise" on pensions.

On Monday, Boeing released what it called its "Best and Final" contract offer—a slightly modified version from the first—directly to the membership. Only after it became abundantly clear that workers would reject this deal too, did IAM officials announce that they would not bring it to a vote Friday.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to one of the leaders of the Boeing Rank-and-File Committee about the latest developments.

"I think the reason Boeing tried to bypass everything is that they are trying to figure out how to close this strike. Financially, I don't think the company can sustain this any longer. Maybe when they have good finances, they could have

a strike of up to 60 or 80 days without running operations, but right now they have no cash.

"I think the IAM leadership is trying to smooth this out because they have multiple strikes going on," referring to the strike that began Monday after 5,000 machinists rejected a similar IAM-backed contract at Textron Aviation in Wichita, Kansas.

The IAM officials, he said, are "trying to explain to Boeing, 'We got burned when you came to us with the 25 percent offer, with not enough for the 401k and the medical benefits.' So the union is saying, 'You have to sweeten the deal so that we can look good. If you don't, you're screwed and we're screwed.'"

"Even though what Boeing did, sending the offer directly to the workers, is illicit, what's going to happen? The laws are designed for them, not for the workers. Everything Congress does is for the rich. They speak for the top 1 and top 10 percent. They aren't for the average Joe who works a 40-hour schedule Monday to Friday. They are all millionaires that don't understand what it's like to live for the rest of us."

The members of Congress, he quipped "are all lawyers but they don't actually practice the law."

"For example, if you want to change your union, to try and get new representation, the law is that you have to wait a whole year. And in those 12 months, the company can do basically anything it wants to the workers. The damage done would be ridiculously high. And the other unions are just as corrupt anyway."

Because of this, he stressed the importance of building the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee so that power and decision making can be transferred from the IAM bureaucracy to the workers on the factory floor.

"We want to create an organization that represents the rank and file itself, inside the Boeing company and independent from the IAM International and local bureaucrats. If I'm putting dues money in, I want it to benefit the entire membership, not just a specific group of people.

"Even a 40 percent pay raise, which workers are demanding, doesn't really cover inflation since our last contract. Forty percent immediately and 40 percent over the next 4 years is

reasonable, because prices are that high. If you're making \$100,000 a year now, that's \$140,000 going to \$180,000, and that's reasonable because it's the minimum you're going to need to buy a house in Washington state. Your house is going to consume \$60,000 a year in mortgage payments, and then you have property taxes and insurance.

"When I purchased my house, my insurance was \$325 a month and now it's \$1,500. Ten years ago I used to pay \$99 for water and sewerage, now it's \$169. Electricity has gone up the same. So, I try to keep my water consumption down and use as little power as possible. The house is barely on.

"As for medical, we used to pay \$20 every paycheck. Now it's \$139. But we didn't get a pay raise as medical costs went up.

"So, when the company comes and says, 'We're in a bad situation, blah, blah, blah,' that's not our responsibility. It wasn't the rank and file that said, 'Let's make all these bad quality decisions.'"

Boeing is currently \$60 billion in debt, as a result of plunging aircraft sales in the wake of the two 737 MAX 8 crashes that killed 346 passengers and crew and the sharply cut air travel during 2020 and 2021, in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

After the plane disasters it emerged that Boeing had spent a \$43 billion on stock buybacks between 2013 and 2019—more than its total profits during that period—while ignoring warnings from workers and engineers about design flaws and cutting corners on safety.

The veteran machinist continued, "I personally think we need to cut straight to the point. The workers have our demands, and Boeing should give us what we ask. Boeing can certainly put out its offer, but if it's not enough, I don't want to talk about it.

"If I'm asking 100 percent and they only offer 20 percent, I'm not going to give it to you. That's what Boeing did, they didn't even get it to 50 percent. If you're offering is so low, we cannot take you seriously.

"We also need COLA, and maybe even profit sharing, like in the airlines and auto industry. Because we also can't attract the skill we need. The cost of living is too high and the pay is too low, so no one wants to transfer in to the company."

Referring to the hemorrhaging of jobs at Boeing, "When we trained people, it used to be a one-on-one relationship. We could really watch over what they were doing and show them exactly how things are done. But now, maybe one-fourth of us know everything about the airplanes, and we have to train the other three-quarters. You can't do that when you also have your own work to do.

"So, it creates even more delays, even more issues. If the pay isn't there, people are just going to leave. What they should really do to fix this company is cut two-thirds of the top management. Then the rest get the direct warning that if they keep messing up, they'll be out the door too."

"The union is pretty much the same as a corporation. They do

exactly the same thing where all the leadership just sucks up more money and don't really make any difference."

In fact, the IAM apparatus is directly aiding the corporation and the Biden administration by trying to starve workers into submission. After delaying any strike benefits for two weeks, IAM officials are supposed to start \$250 a week strike benefits today.

At the same time, the officials who lead the IAM and other unions are deliberately isolating the strike, even though hundreds of thousands of workers are facing the same struggles.

The Boeing Rank-and-File Committee is demanding an immediate tripling of strike benefits to sustain workers in this battle with the giant aerospace and defense company. The strike fund and the union's \$300 million in assets belong to the workers and should be used to win this fight instead of paying the high salaries of the IAM bureaucracy to lobby Congress and build a new union headquarters.

At the same, the Boeing Rank-and-File Committee is fighting to broaden the struggle and mobilize the working class against any attempt by the Biden administration to break the strike in the name of "national security."

The conditions to build a powerful support for the strike are quickly emerging. Last week, 5,000 workers at Textron Aviation went on strike after rejecting another IAM-backed contract, which union officials said was the "best in decades."

On October 1, 45,000 dockworkers on the East Coast and the Gulf of Mexico are set to strike. Flight attendants at Seattle-based Alaska airlines rejected a federal mediated sellout contract brought back by their union last month, Seattle educators are fighting public school closures and Washington state employees want to strike.

But uniting all these struggles will not happen from the top, the committee warns, but only from below, through the expansion of the rank-and-file committee movement.



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