

Mediated talks at defense contractor Boeing set to restart following Biden-led shutdown of dock strike

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4 October 2024

Government-mediated talks are set to resume Monday between Boeing and International Association of Machinists (IAM) officials, following Thursday's shutdown of the East Coast docks strike. Roughly 33,000 Boeing machinists have been on strike for nearly three weeks.

This will be the third round of talks mediated by the federal government, which is eager to shut down the strike. US imperialism is on the brink of war with Iran as Ukraine launches missile strikes against Russia, and it cannot allow a strike at a major defense contractor to continue.

On Friday afternoon, the *Washington Post* published an article detailing the Biden administration's key role in ending the dockworkers' strike. The paper described a "stark ultimatum" early Thursday morning by White House officials on a call with shipping executives.

According to the *Post's* account of the meeting:

With the nation's economy—and much of the president's legacy—hanging in the balance just weeks before the election, White House chief economist Lael Brainard told management that they needed to come up with a new offer to the striking longshoremen. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg stressed that Hurricane Helene magnified the importance of a deal. Labor Secretary Julie Su expressed optimism that the union would agree to a temporary extension if raises were included.

"I need the offer today—not tomorrow. Today," the

Post cited White House Chief of Staff Jeff Zients as telling port executives. "I'm going to brief the president in an hour that you believe you can get this done today."

The *Post* attempts to spin this as the White House intervening on the side of workers. In reality, the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) bailed out the government by shutting down the strike without a new contract. Discussions have barely begun on the key question of automation, which threatens to eliminate thousands of jobs.

Instead, workers are returning to the docks on a 90-day extension of the old contract. This is a de facto injunction, which allows Biden, who banned a national rail strike in 2022, to posture as not having had to impose one. In some ways it is worse than an injunction. The 90-day extension is 10 days longer than the "cooling off period" under the Taft-Hartley Act.

What the government was really terrified of was not the (wildly exaggerated) impact of the strike on hurricane relief or even "the economy"—by which they mean share values and corporate profits—but that the strikes at Boeing and the docks could touch off a wider movement in the working class, jeopardizing the plans for war.

This is the latest major contract in which Biden has relied on the pro-corporate union bureaucracy, which he refers to as his "domestic NATO." Even during the strike, the ILA promised to continue moving military equipment overseas. While the bureaucracy pledged its allegiance to the US war machine, Florida Republican Governor Ron DeSantis was on the verge yesterday of sending the National Guard against the workers throughout the state, underscoring that the working

class fight against exploitation is inseparably connected to the fight against imperialism.

Boeing strike

With the strike over at the docks, at least for now, Biden is free to turn his attention to the Boeing strike. This struggle has taken the form of a rebellion against the IAM bureaucracy, which tried to spring a last minute contract on workers that was rejected by 95 percent.

On Friday, Washington congresswoman Pramila Jayapal visited the Boeing picket lines in Washington state, the latest in a series of a Democratic officeholders to stage photo-ops at the picket lines. Other officials include congresspeople Val Hoyle, Suzan DelBene and Rick Larsen, according to the union. Jayapal, the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, is the highest ranking lawmaker to visit the picket lines.

Such visits by Democrats are the “kiss of death.” The most notorious example was last year’s visit by President Biden to the picket lines in the auto industry, where the United Auto Workers had called a limited “stand-up strike” at a handful of plants. The White House later endorsed a new UAW contract, hailing it as a supposed “victory.”

Within months, thousands of autoworkers lost their jobs under the new deal. Nearly 2,500 workers at the Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant near Detroit are set to lose their jobs on October 8.

Two more accidents this week involving Boeing airliners underscore the need for workers’ control over production as the solution to the profit-driven safety scandal which has killed hundreds of people.

On Thursday, a Boeing 737-800 operated by Irish budget airline Ryanair caught fire at Brindisi Airport in Italy shortly before takeoff, forcing the evacuation of more than 180 passengers and temporarily closing the airport’s operations. Passenger footage showed a fireball forming on the aircraft’s right engine.

On Tuesday, another Ryanair 737 had a tire issue while landing at Bergamo airport in Milan, Italy.

On Monday, the US National Transportation Safety Board sent a letter to Congress that as many as 40

airlines worldwide may be operating Boeing 737 aircraft with potentially faulty rudder parts. Last week, it released a report on the potential for jamming in the rudder control guidance system, which the Board discovered during its investigation into a near-accident at the start of this year in Newark, New Jersey.

Meanwhile, Boeing and the IAM bureaucracy are tightening the screws on the workers in a bid to wear down their resistance on the picket lines. On Tuesday, the company shut off health insurance for all 33,000 strikers, while workers also missed their first regular paycheck this week. The IAM, which controls \$300 million in assets financed from workers’ dues money, is stringing workers out on \$250 per week.

Following an earlier round of mediated talks, Boeing went directly to the press with a contract offer with 30 percent cumulative pay increases, on the condition that workers ratify it immediately. This was a trial balloon to test workers’ resolve. After waiting the whole day, the IAM finally issued a statement denouncing the move, once it became clear workers would not accept it.

While the strike still has immense support, workers across the US and the world cannot allow the Boeing strike to be isolated. The Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee, formed during the strike to fight for democratic control against the sellout bureaucrats, called on workers Thursday to “turn our strikes into a broader movement of the working class against exploitation and war.”



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