

On brink of war with Iran, US Labor Secretary heads to Seattle in effort to shut down Boeing strike

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14 October 2024

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Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su flew to Seattle Monday for discussions with union and company officials in an effort to shut down a four-week strike by 33,000 Boeing workers, Reuters reported yesterday afternoon.

The dispatch of Su is the most overt act by the government against the strike so far, following a series of statements over the past week. While Su's activity will inevitably be cloaked in phrases about "an equitable agreement," her task is to impose, through close collaboration with the International Association of Machinists (IAM) bureaucracy, a contract favorable to management.

Last year, Su traveled to the West Coast, as dockworkers began conducting wildcat job actions in protest of being left on the job for a year with no contract. Within days, Su brokered a new deal, which the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) bureaucracy rapidly crammed through. That she is now being sent personally to Seattle indicates the White House aims to shut down the strike in the next few days.

The situation is urgent. Boeing workers must adopt a new strategy, based on an understanding that they are in a fight not only against Boeing but the government and the entire capitalist class. In response, they must build the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee to link up with workers across the US and the world. The Boeing workers' rebellion against the IAM apparatus,

which did not want a strike and is trying to starve workers out, should be connected to a broader fight against exploitation and war.

The White House is determined to shut down a strike against a major defense contractor as it prepares a major war with Iran. The United States announced it was moving US troops and air defense systems into Israel as a tripwire to draw itself into the conflict. This escalation, after Washington has backed and armed Israel's genocide in Gaza for more than a year, is aimed at restoring US domination over the Middle East and its key energy resources and supply routes.

The Biden administration's intervention at Boeing follows its role in shutting down a three-day strike on the East Coast and Gulf Coast docks two weeks ago. The White House is utilizing the nationalist, pro-corporate union bureaucracy, which Biden refers to as his "domestic NATO," to suppress domestic opposition to US imperialism's wars abroad and the war on the working class at home.

Boeing, confident in its support from the government, has gone on the offensive, announcing last Friday it would lay off 10 percent of its global workforce, or 17,000 employees.

On Friday, in court arguments on a settlement over two fatal accidents on Boeing airliners that killed 346 people, company lawyers made the arrogant claim that the aerospace giant "is a pillar of the national economy and the national defense" and therefore should not be subject to stiffer penalties for the massive safety issues on Boeing aircraft. In particular an attorney warned that Boeing would miss out on future defense contracts and that the "global and national supply chain" would be "put into doubt" if the current settlement were not

accepted.

This theme is being taken up in the corporate press. On Sunday, the *Wall Street Journal* published an editorial accusing Boeing workers of “taking Boeing hostage.” In reality, it is Boeing and its shareholders that are taking the economy hostage by threatening mass layoffs in retaliation for the strike.

The *Journal* continued, “While the strike doesn’t have the same potential to shut down the U.S. economy as the longshoremen stoppage, it could have larger consequences for national security. The strike is delaying production of military jets, and the layoffs could reduce research and development on defense and space.”

Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party’s candidate for US vice president, issued a statement Monday evening denouncing the moves by the Biden administration to shut down the strike.

“In intervening to shut down the strike, the Biden administration is defending corporate criminals implicated in the deaths of hundreds of people,” he wrote. “Years of relentless, profit-driven cost-cutting have led to massive safety issues on the company’s 737 MAX aircraft, including two fatal crashes in 2018 and 2019. On top of this, the suspicious deaths of two Boeing whistleblowers has yet to be adequately explained. These are lives which were sacrificed to profit.”

White denounced the escalation of the war in the Middle East and the genocide in Gaza, noting, “The bombs that Israel, the US attack dog in the Middle East, is raining down on the defenseless population of Gaza are being made in the USA and shipped by the White House to Israel as fast as they can be made.”

He stressed the necessity for a full mobilization of the entire working class, “which has a stake in this strike because it is not just a fight against Boeing executives but against the entire capitalist profit system, which subordinates all decision making to profit.”

He added, “The unaccountable power of Boeing and the other major corporations must be shattered, and their assets must be placed at the disposal of human need, not Wall Street. I call on workers to fight for the transformation of Boeing and other basic industries into public utilities, democratically run by workers themselves.”

A Boeing machinist, speaking to the WSWS, said,

“Now that the docks strike is shut down, they’re able to shift their focus to us. It’s like what happened in 2022 on the railroads. The railroaders got screwed. I sure hope that doesn’t happen to us.”

The worker continued, “The layoffs are also a part of that. I talked to one of my engineer friends, and they are all really worried about how that’s going to affect them. They don’t get laid off by seniority, so even though he’s been around for 20 years, he might get laid off.

“My machinist friends keep asking when we’re going to get back on the picket lines. They’ve been really thin, and no new picket cards have been sent out by the IAM. So there’s not really a schedule for picketing like there was at the beginning of the strike.

“People have gone to find other jobs because the strike pay (\$250 a week) isn’t enough. So that also means less people are on the line. I also know several co-workers from Vietnam who went home after the first week or so to stay with family over there. They’ll come back after the strike, but they couldn’t afford to stay.”



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