

Embraer workers reject contract proposal in Brazil amid US Boeing workers strike

Eduardo Parati
15 October 2024

Workers at Brazil's aerospace giant Embraer rejected a new collective bargaining agreement at a mass meeting on September 24. The deal would have cut multiple benefits and offered no real pay rise. Workers have been without a collective agreement since 2017 and without a real pay rise for around ten years.

Among other attacks, the agreement proposed by the corporation removed the guarantee of job stability for workers with occupational diseases and victims of accidents at work. As well as rejecting this proposal and a five percent pay raise, workers are demanding a doubling of their grocery voucher, currently at R\$400 (US\$72).

Significantly, workers discussed the possibility of going on strike, but decided to wait for a new proposal from the company, which has not come. If they walk out, they will be joining the 33,000 Boeing workers in the US who have been on strike since September 14.

The positions that these companies occupy in world commercial and military aviation manufacturing express the enormous potential of a unified struggle, while leaving the ruling elites increasingly worried about the radicalization of these workers. Boeing is the second largest producer of civil/commercial and military aircraft in the world, while Embraer is third in commercial aircraft, with around 10 percent of its revenue coming from military aircraft sales.

A crucial role in isolating and betraying the struggle of workers at Embraer and other companies in the important industrial region of São José dos Campos, in the countryside of Brazil's richest and most industrialized state, São Paulo, has been played by the São José dos Campos Metalworkers' Union (SindmetalSJC). This union is affiliated with the CSP-Conlutas trade union federation and run by bureaucrats from the Morenoite Unified Socialist Workers' Party (PSTU).

The Embraer workers' struggle is taking place after GM workers in São José dos Campos also rejected a contract proposal, and SindmetalSJC forced workers to accept a new voluntary termination program that has already caused the plant to lose more than 700 workers last year.

SindmetalSJC is pursuing the same course as during the GM workers' struggle, selling the illusion that Embraer workers can solve their burning issues at the negotiating table and pressuring the government of Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Workers Party - PT) to make multi-billion investments in the company.

The nationalist program defended by SindmetalSJC, Conlutas and the PSTU, based on pressuring the bourgeois state, is entirely hostile to workers' interests and has meant the intense worsening of working class living standards over the last decade. Hostile to an international strategy to confront the transnational corporations, these forces advocate intensifying cuts to keep transnational corporations operating in Brazil.

Successive administrations at municipal, state and federal level, including those of the PT, have, with the support of the unions controlled by the pseudo-left, defended tax cuts and subsidies to companies like GM in the name of protecting jobs, but in reality pitting workers in different countries and even different cities against each other in a race to the bottom.

Reality has clashed head-on with this perspective. At GM in São José dos Campos, the number of workers has collapsed from 12,000 in the early 2010s to around 3,000 today. This happened even after countless subsidies from successive São Paulo governments and supposed job-protection programs from the government of former PT president Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016). Meanwhile, GM in Brazil has recorded record profits.

The situation for Embraer workers is no different. Data from the Latin American Institute for Socio-Economic Studies (ILAESE) shows that the number of Embraer workers fell from 19,373 in 2015 to 15,214 in 2020, a drop of 21.5 percent. At the same time, the percentage of outsourced workers hired directly by the company jumped from 26.5 percent in 2009 to 50.47 percent today.

Just as the WSWs has emphasized in the Boeing workers' struggle, there are important political issues at stake that Embraer workers must also confront in the midst of a growing crisis of world capitalism and threats of a new world war and the consequent annihilation of humanity. In the US and Brazil, the rejection of the contract and the workers' demand for higher wages and other benefits must be accompanied by a socialist and internationalist perspective.

São José dos Campos is part of the most important defense industry hub in Brazil, which includes the largest producer of military armaments in Brazil, Avibras, and Boeing's own Engineering and Technology Center. São José dos Campos is also home to numerous Brazilian Air Force facilities and bases.

With their arms contracts, these companies, including Embraer, are at the center of multiple geostrategic interests. Embraer's Super Tucano light attack aircraft has been a sales success for the

Brazilian company in numerous countries over the last 25 years, including the US, which used it over the last decade in the war in Afghanistan.

Today, Embraer's largest military aircraft is the KC-390 freighter, which has been sold to numerous NATO countries, Saudi Arabia and South Korea. Critically, these countries are being placed respectively on the war fronts against Russia, Iran and China in an emerging new world war spearheaded by US imperialism.

A stoppage of production in San José dos Campos would bring into focus the enormous power of the working class and the prospect of a unified struggle with workers in the US, who are confronting Boeing ever more aggressively. Stopping the shipment and future sales of military equipment shows the capacity of the working class to stop imperialist war plans.

Embraer union allies itself with Biden's "domestic NATO"

This, however, has been deliberately omitted by SindmetalSJC, which in recent years has maintained close contact with American unions, especially the UAW, which Joe Biden's administration has increasingly incorporated into US imperialism's war plans. At the beginning of July, on a visit to the headquarters of the AFL-CIO, the largest trade union federation in the US, Biden referred to the unions as "my domestic NATO."

The PSTU, meanwhile, has a record of supporting imperialist interventions in Libya, Syria and now in Ukraine, where it alleges that "Russian imperialism" is confronting the NATO-backed "Ukrainian resistance," armed by the imperialist powers and filled with neo-Nazi groups.

SindmetalSJC's nationalist and pro-corporate program has increasingly asked for the collaboration of the Lula government, which, like the Biden administration, has worked to integrate the unions even further into the bourgeois state. This, in turn, also shows that, despite their tactical differences, there is fundamental agreement between the PT and the PSTU, which was expelled by the former in 1992.

At the end of September, after the Embraer agreement was rejected, SindmetalSJC wrote a letter to the Lula government denouncing "Embraer's anti-union stance and the company's attacks against aviation workers' historic rights." SindmetalSJC director and PSTU member Herbert Claros told the SindmetalSJC website: "Lula, who has visited Embraer twice this year, cannot be complicit in this policy that disrespects trade unions and, even less so, accept lowering working conditions."

Also, according to the letter, SindmetalSJC demands, "as a matter of urgency, that a meeting be scheduled with representatives of the government and the BNDES (National Bank for Economic and Social Development), since Embraer often receives state funding." Critically, the BNDES is one of the main instruments that the Lula government has used for its "neo-industrialization" policy. The New Industry Brazil, launched in February, explicitly parrots many of the main positions taken by the Biden administration and the European powers in response to China's emergence as a global economic power.

This policy of SindmetalSJC and the PSTU was also recently exposed in the recent municipal elections in Brazil, which was held on October 6 and resulted in dozens of run-off races, to be

decided on October 27. Repeating its stance from previous elections, the PSTU is advancing in this year's run-off with the call for a "critical vote" for the PT and the pseudo-left Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL), supposedly to combat fascism represented by the candidates supported by former president Jair Bolsonaro.

During an interview with *gI* on September 28, shortly before the first round, the PSTU candidate in São José dos Campos, Toninho Ferreira, said: "There is a process of deindustrialization in the country. Today, the country only lives by selling commodities, from soybeans to iron ore." The answer to this situation, which can only be solved with an international strategy based on the socialist revolution, was put from a strictly national point of view by Ferreira, who limited himself to defending public works based on the attempt to reindustrialize the country: "We can build a lot of popular housing... nurseries, schools."

As the September 18 WSWs perspective put it, the Boeing workers' struggle "for the social right to a secure and good-paying job, fully paid pensions, free healthcare and affordable housing...can only be achieved through the working class fighting to take political power into its own hands and transforming the giant corporations and banks into publicly owned enterprises."

It continued: "Boeing must be converted into a public utility, collectively owned and democratically controlled by the workers and technicians who are committed to building safe airplanes." The same imperative is posed in the Embraer workers' struggle in Brazil.

This is the basis for a unified struggle between Boeing and Embraer workers. Against the nationalist, militarist and pro-corporate perspective of the unions in the US and Brazil, this unity can only be achieved through independent rank-and-file committees that are building the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IAW-RFC). Most importantly, these committees, like the one recently formed at Boeing, must carry out a political struggle for the socialist transformation of economic and political life in Brazil, the US and the whole world.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)