

IAM union announces snap vote in bid to shut down Boeing strike

Bryan Dyne
19 October 2024

The following statement was issued by the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee. To join the committee, text (406) 414-7648, email boeingworkersrfc@gmail.com or fill out the form at the end of this article.

The International Association of Machinists (IAM) leadership announced a new tentative agreement Saturday with Boeing to end a month-long strike by 33,000 workers. A vote on the agreement is scheduled for Wednesday, October 23.

The IAM has presented the deal as having “several key improvements” over the initial proposal, but it still remains below what workers are demanding, which includes a 40 percent raise to fight inflation, the restoration of the company pension and increased medical benefits.

The proposed contract meets none of these. The proposed raise is only 35 percent over four years, minor increases to workers’ 401k plans and setting a minimum for the annual bonus at 4 percent, which previously averaged at 3.7 percent. The pension, one of the chief demands of the workers, has been completely left out.

In a cynical attempt to placate workers, as well as divide old and new workers, the IAM officials wrote that, with the structure of wage increases, “Members at MAX rate will receive 39.78% wage growth over the 4-year agreement,” which they attempt to spin as “it should be safe to say that our goal of over 40% wage growth during the life of the agreement has been achieved.”

The proposal confirms the warning made by the *World Socialist Web Site* since the beginning of the strike, that Boeing and the pro-corporate bureaucrats of the IAM are colluding to get a pro-company contract passed so that Boeing can resume production on its

terms and force workers to pay for the company’s mountain of self-inflicted debt.

Workers must reject the contract by as wide a margin as possible. After four weeks on strike, workers need a new strategy, based on mobilizing the working class against Boeing and its allies in Wall Street, both parties and the union bureaucracy. As the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee explained in a statement Wednesday, “Everything depends wholly on the initiative of the rank and file to expand our struggle and unite with other sections of the working class.”

The Boeing contract was announced only two days after the IAM announced a sellout contract at Textron, with wage increases even less than the first deal which Boeing workers rejected by 95 percent in September.

The timing of the two votes signals that a decision had been made, at the highest levels, that these strikes have to end in the leadup to the US presidential election and in order to prepare the home front for catastrophic new wars. Boeing is a major defense contractor, and any strike, especially one involving 33,000 machinists, is a direct threat to the US government’s ability to continue to supply war materiel for Israel’s genocide in Gaza, the US-NATO war in Ukraine against Russia and now the plans for a new war against Iran.

The US government played a central role in brokering the new deal, which came only days after the Biden administration dispatched acting Labor Secretary Julie Su to Seattle to take part in talks. The IAM bureaucracy acknowledged the new contract was written “with the assistance of ... Su.” Su was also instrumental in shutting down the three-day strike on the East Coast and Gulf Coast docks, on the basis of a 90-day extension, without any agreement on the key issue of automation.

On Friday, the day before the contract was

announced, Biden flew to Europe to meet with the governments of France, Germany and Britain to firm up war plans against Russia and when the US is on the brink of all-out war with Iran.

The new contract also reflects the massive backing Boeing has received from Wall Street, including a \$10 billion loan and an asset sale of \$25 billion. The US ruling elite has made clear it is prepared to spend vast sums of money in order to both break the machinists' strike and set a precedent for contracts in other sections of the working class. The crisis of American capitalism, reflected in part in Boeing's \$60 billion in debt, is to be paid on the backs of workers.

Whatever minor changes to wages, retirement and the signing bonus will be more than offset by a jobs bloodbath after the strike ends. The company has already announced it will lay off 17,000 workers, or 10 percent of its global workforce.

It is also likely that future cuts are already being planned. Last year, the Teamsters and United Auto Workers announced deals at UPS and the Big Three automakers, respectively, where they cited minor wage increases and other provisions to claim massive victories. But within weeks, both UPS and the auto companies announced tens of thousands of layoffs, driven in particular by automation and other new technologies.

At UPS, the company announced earlier this year its plans to close or automate 200 facilities in the US, on top of 12,000 job cuts announced at the start of the year. In reality, the company already employs tens of thousands less people than it did a few years ago.

And in the auto industry, whole plants are on the chopping block after a limited "stand-up strike," which the union closely coordinated with the White House, and thousands of supplemental workers have been summarily fired.

From the beginning, the IAM bureaucracy has had a strategy for defeat, not victory. It never wanted this strike in the first place, which only happened after 95 percent of the workers voted down a sellout deal last month. Since then, it has tried to soften workers up on the picket line with strike pay of \$250 a week, which only started on the third week, while talks continued behind closed doors.

"The strike pay is horrible," one worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*. "I've had to get a second job

at UPS just to survive, along with a lot of others. It also means there's less of us on the picket lines.

"I'm irritated with the union myself, the leaders. I've been with the company for more than a decade, and I've watched them raise our union dues every time we're getting a cost-of-living adjustment. So they're taking our money, and they get their pension. But a strike doesn't hit their salary."

The fight going forward must be developed on a new axis. The fight cannot remain as it is, isolated and guided into the ground by the apparatus. A new leadership, directly composed of and accountable to workers, must be built.

Boeing workers must directly appeal to other sections of workers, including railroaders, dockworkers, UPS workers, autoworkers and others for joint mass industrial action. An immediate appeal must also be made to the 5,000 Textron Aviation machinists, who are voting this weekend on their own contract.

Workers have the power to fight against Boeing, but it cannot remain under the leadership of the IAM bureaucracy. The Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which has consistently warned of a sellout, continues to call for the broadest possible expansion of the strike, which must be developed and expanded into a genuine fight against Boeing, its government and Wall Street backers.

"The whole of corporate America is lining up behind Boeing," as the Committee said Wednesday. "The working class must line up behind us."



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact