

IAM declares Textron Aviation contract ratified despite widespread rank-and-file opposition

Marcus Day
20 October 2024

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On Sunday, International Association of Machinists (IAM) Lodge 774 announced the ratification of its proposed contract with Textron Aviation, shutting down a nearly month-long strike by 5,000 machinists in Wichita, Kansas. The IAM stated that shifts would resume beginning Wednesday, October 23.

IAM officials have yet to release ballot totals, but there had been widespread rank-and-file opposition to the deal in the run-up to the vote over the weekend. Many described the offer as even worse than the IAM-endorsed deal that Textron workers had overwhelmingly rejected in September. The main change was the extension of the contract by an additional year, which is generally to the advantage of the company, as it seeks to secure “labor peace” and keep a lid on labor costs for a longer period.

Textron workers took to social media immediately after the IAM announced ratification, expressing indignation and voicing suspicion over the legitimacy of the official result.

“How do we confirm that you didn’t lie about the votes?” one worker wrote on Facebook. “Who counts them?”

Another commented, “Ridiculous!! Why strike and go without income for five weeks for a worse contract.”

A third said, “I’m out!!! Been in for 28 years, never struck even when we should have, beginning with losing pensions and core insurance. Corporate greed has taken over this union and country. When you have union reps telling you to give up, [that] was all I needed to hear. Sad this union has had years to get us and them

ready for a strike and they let us all down!!!”

Workers have every right to demand a release of the ballot totals and audit the count, which should be conducted under the supervision of trusted rank-and-file workers. While IAM Lodge 774 had adopted a phony pose of “neutrality” before the vote—claiming it was not formally calling for the deal’s acceptance or rejection—it is clear that the union bureaucracy never wanted the walkout and did everything in its power to secure the company’s demands.

The IAM’s shutdown and sabotage of the Textron strike is part of a full-court press by the corporations, the union bureaucracies and the White House to suppress workers’ struggles with just over two weeks remaining till the US elections.

The fear within the ruling class is that the growing rebellion against union-backed sellout contracts—particularly at major military contractors like Textron, Boeing, and Eaton Aerospace—threatens to intersect with the explosive political crisis surrounding the elections and disrupt Washington’s efforts to escalate war with Russia and in the Middle East.

On Saturday, the IAM apparatus announced that there would be a snap vote at Boeing this coming Wednesday on a deal to end the strike by 33,000 machinists. The announcement came shortly after Biden dispatched Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su to the Seattle area to get a deal through.

As one financial analyst quoted by *Bloomberg* over the weekend put it, securing passage of the deal at Boeing “would de-risk an incredibly dangerous situation.”

Meanwhile, United Auto Workers union officials are in closed-door talks with a federal mediator as they

seek to wind down a strike by 525 Eaton Aerospace workers in Jackson, Michigan.

At Textron, CEO Ron Draper made it clear the company got the contract it wanted, stating, “We are pleased to have ratified a contract with the IAM that offers our employees, their families and the Wichita community a shared future...The ratification of this contract marks a new chapter, and we are eager to move forward together.”

The IAM starved workers on just \$200 a week in strike pay. After the company cut off workers’ health insurance, the IAM only provided an additional \$150 in assistance to cover health expenses to those who applied and indicated financial hardship, despite the union apparatus sitting on \$300 million in assets and paying the IAM president over \$660,000 last year.

Moreover, IAM 774 sought to intimidate workers from expressing opposition to the deal at this weekend’s ratification meeting. Sheriff’s deputies were posted outside the union hall, and the IAM had stated that any workers causing distractions would be removed from the meeting: “Law enforcement will escort violators off the property and you will NOT be allowed to vote.”

Prior to the vote, workers had denounced the IAM for attempting to intimidate opposition. One commented: “You’re also splitting up the group and prohibiting us from making our discontent known? Law enforcement???” This is arguably worse than the last contract!!

“Also why the hell are we extending the contract to five years now instead of four?? Won’t that put a damper on what our raise would be that fifth year??

“Just say that Textron is paying you guys off. What a joke.”

But despite the efforts of the union bureaucracies to smother opposition, discontent among workers continues to build. Over the weekend, approximately 400 workers at two Eaton B-Line plants in Troy and Highland, Illinois, overwhelmingly voted down an IAM deal. The agreement would have raised wages by just 3 percent annually, a massive cut to real wages with inflation taken into account. The St. Louis-metro area workers are set to launch a strike as of midnight on Monday.

Anger within the working class is building over eroding living standards and the impact of inflation on

stagnating wages, which is driving workers into conflict with the pro-corporate union bureaucracies.

At the same time, the ruling class is seeking to make workers shoulder the costs of the escalating war in Ukraine and preparations for war across the Middle East and against China. Throughout broad sectors of the economy, corporations are utilizing automation and other new technologies to shed jobs, more than offsetting marginal wage increases.

Boeing has announced it will be cutting 10 percent of its workforce, or 17,000 jobs. Last April, Textron announced it was expanding its restructuring plan and would be cutting 1,500 positions, 4 percent of its workforce. And Eaton stated earlier this spring that it was undertaking its own restructuring efforts but has yet to reveal what the impact on jobs will be.

The fight to defend jobs and win inflation-busting wage increases, the restoration of pensions and more, requires that workers take control of their struggles out of the hands of the corrupt union bureaucracies.

At Boeing, workers have taken the critical step of initiating the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee. In a statement last week, the committee called for the expansion of the strike to other sections of workers, the increase in weekly strike pay to \$750 and rank-and-file oversight over all contract talks.

“We are not just facing Boeing but an entire profit system that is bearing down on our strike with enormous force,” the workers stated. “Everything depends wholly on the initiative of the rank and file to expand our struggle and unite with other sections of the working class.”



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