

Following end of two-month strike, Boeing begins carrying out mass layoffs

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Boeing workers: tell us what conditions are like on the shop floor now that production has restarted. Fill out the form below: All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Aerospace giant Boeing has begun issuing layoff notices as part of a previously announced plan to cut 17,000 jobs worldwide, the company announced Wednesday. The total cuts amount to 10 percent of its total workforce.

“As previously announced, we are adjusting our workforce levels to align with our financial reality and a more focused set of priorities,” Boeing told Reuters. “We are committed to ensuring our employees have support during this challenging time.”

These supposed “financial realities” are the result of management looting the company on behalf of its Wall Street shareholders. As of the company’s September financial reports, the company has a total debt of \$57.65 billion. In the 30 years from 1998 to 2018, Boeing paid out \$61 billion in stock buybacks, equivalent to nearly 82 percent of its profits.

Most of these buybacks, around \$43 billion, took place since 2013. The same period saw the company slash safety and quality standards to the bone, contributing to the massive scandal over the latest versions of its 737 airliners. Two 737 MAX 8 aircraft crashed in 2018 and 2019. Since then, Boeing aircraft experiencing serious safety problems have become a regular occurrence.

The current round of layoffs, which are slated to continue through Friday, come after a protracted strike against the corporation by its 33,000 machinists. The workers voted down two contracts brought to them by the International Association of Machinists (IAM) bureaucracy because they did not meet their demands of a 40 percent pay increase and the restoration of

company pensions.

A third contract brought to workers—brokered with the help of the Biden administration and Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su—was only forced through after workers were starved out on the picket lines for several weeks on \$250-a-week strike pay. Boeing CEO Kelly Ortberg threatened that any future contracts would be worse, not better.

There are also more layoffs to come. As one worker explained to the WSWS, “The 17,000 layoffs are for salaried workers, which is managers and engineers. Some of them got notices already and more to come for them by Monday next week. As for machinists, nothing yet, but 10-12 percent is expected.

“The biggest number of layoffs will start in our support, like PCO (parts handlers), toolroom, wire shop electricians and quality assurance. The rule we go by is the closer you are to the airplane, the less likely to get laid off.

“I know WARN notices went out today and will continue to go out through Friday for salary employees. Right now I know first line managers and customer quality service representatives got them yesterday.

“I think it’s funny they think they are punishing us by not allowing us to work overtime for the next five weeks. They will change their tune in about two weeks and ask us to work. They are so far behind. They have a crap load of engines sitting on the factory floor that need to be installed. They want to deliver five 777’s by the end of the year. Not gonna happen without overtime.”

Layoffs also include machinists in St. Louis, where much of Boeing’s defense manufacturing takes place. According to one worker on social media, “111 people we’re just laid off from BDS IAM 837 St Louis. Some union members, but mostly people who were still on

probation and not in the union yet.”

The IAM bureaucracy also played a critical role in laying the groundwork for the layoffs. Reading the strike “updates” from the union heads during the strike, one would have no idea that layoffs were just around the corner.

In contrast, the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee, founded to oppose sabotage by the IAM officials, warned in October that “Boeing is retaliating.”

It explained: “The company is taking these measures because it feels confident in its position, for three reasons:

“First, behind Boeing is Wall Street ... the company is a major linchpin of the American economy, including a major exporter, and the corporate oligarchy considers it ‘too big to fail’ ...

“Second, Boeing knows it has the support of the Biden-Harris administration. Boeing is a major defense contractor ...

“Third, Boeing can count on the support of the union bureaucracy, which never wanted this strike in the first place.”

These warnings are now being borne out in full. Boeing is determined to impose the cost of the strike, estimated at over \$10 billion, onto the backs of workers themselves.

Now that the strike was shut down, the IAM apparatus is attempting to conduct damage control. It is telling that District 751 President Jon Holden stated in a press conference after the final contract vote totals were announced that, “they need us to build them,” before adding, “I hope the company can reconsider.”

One worker retorted on social media: “Reconsider what, Jon? There’s a lot of chatter about them bleeding down to the IAM rank-and-file. Boeing knows about them. The IAM knows too. Did they negotiate better severance benefits? NOPE. Both were, and are holding out on you. Can’t be messing with the plan to jam a contract up your a** right?”

The worker concluded: “The reality is, they are going to see who quits/retires after the bonuses are deliver[ed]. Then the axe begins to swing. And don’t put it above Boeing to search out new and novel ways to accelerate the draw-down with terminations for cause.”

Thanks to the agreement between Boeing and the

IAM bureaucracy which ended the strike, that could be as simple as showing up for work a few minutes late thanks to Seattle’s traffic.

The alignment of Boeing, the rest of Wall Street, the IAM bureaucracy and the Biden administration against the interests of the workers make clear the need for new forms of struggle. As put forward by the BWRFC,

We are not just facing Boeing but an entire profit system that is bearing down on our strike with enormous force. That Boeing has had to raise so much cash testifies to the impact we have had, but now we must turn toward our natural allies in other sections of the working class and mobilize them as well. Good wages, a secure retirement and high safety standards are our rights and it is only through unifying with other workers can they be won.



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