Speak Out Now
September 16, 2024 mail@speakoutsocialists.org speakoutsocialists.org (510) 343-9105

Boeing Workers' Strike: A Reminder to us All

On Friday, 32,000 workers who produce Boeing planes in the Seattle and Portland areas went on strike. These workers, organized in the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) union, overwhelmingly voted down the tentative agreement put forward by their union leadership with a vote of 94%. The agreement did not come close to meeting any of their demands about retirement benefits, wages, forced overtime, or more. They voted almost unanimously (96%) to go on strike.

The company has tried to paint the workers as greedy for turning down a 25% pay increase over four years. But the agreement also ended a yearly bonus of around 4%, so the proposed increases for the four years only amounted to about 9%. And workers haven't seen any real raises since 2008, while the cost of living has continued to skyrocket. That's why they are asking for a 40% wage increase and to restore their pensions, which have been severely cut since 2016, and offer no real security when they retire.

Workers aren't only asking for long overdue wage increases. They also want to limit mandatory overtime because Boeing is able to require machinists to work up to 19 days in a row. And workers want guarantees that the company will produce its next jet in the region, so Boeing management can't use the threat to relocate production to try to get more concessions in the future.

This strike is also a rejection by the workers of the unsafe production at Boeing, which cares more about the speed of work than the safety of workers and the quality of the planes. Boeing has had a series of high-profile safety incidents in the past several years. In July, a wheel of a Boeing jet came off during takeoff. In January, an entire panel blew off the side of a Boeing jet in mid-flight, forcing an emergency landing. And design defects in their 737 MAX plane led to two fatal plane crashes in 2018 and 2019, which killed 346 people.

And recently, two different employees of Boeing mysteriously died soon after they spoke out as whistleblowers, calling out how Boeing cuts corners on safety to speed up and increase production, prioritizing profit and their own interests above everything else.

Meanwhile, Boeing has made over $21 billion dollars in profits since 2021. Since 2014, Boeing management has spent $40 billion in stock buybacks to increase their own pay and their shareholders', while refusing to improve workers' wages and safety.

Boeing workers have gone on strike when workers across the country are facing similar conditions, with skyrocketing costs for housing, food, energy, healthcare, and more. Just like Boeing workers, most workers' wages have not kept up with prices, and workers everywhere are suffering from forced overtime, extra hours, or working multiple jobs just to get by, while the super rich keep getting richer, and our future continues to grow more uncertain.

And as Boeing workers go on strike, workers all across the country are being bombarded by presidential campaigns from both parties promising they will improve the lives of all workers. The Democrats are trying to take people's dissatisfaction with the economy, and people's outrage at Trump and the Republicans, and channel it all back into getting themselves reelected. Trump and the Republicans are doing everything in their power to turn that same dissatisfaction into further divisions within the population, to pit us against each other using racism, nationalism and more.

The reality is that neither party can offer solutions to the problems caused by the very system they both defend. The Democrats have been in power nearly 12 of the last 16 years, and their empty promises of hope and change have done next to nothing for workers and the poor. And the Republicans' politics of division will never lead to a better quality of life for working people.

But this strike of Boeing workers can be a reminder that we don't have to put all of our hopes into elections. We have better ways to fight back and improve our lives. Workers do the work to make society run. Yes, we have the power to take on our individual bosses, as the Boeing workers are doing now. But also, when we are able to organize the power of all workers together, we can change the whole society. Let the strike of Boeing workers be an inspiration to all of us, and a reminder of the power that workers have if we choose to use it.