

McVitie's issues 472 redundancy notices in Glasgow plant

Steve James
20 June 2021

Redundancy notices issued to the 472 McVitie's workers based at the McVitie's plant in Tollcross, Glasgow show that the McVitie's owner Pladis intends to proceed rapidly with running down and closing the aging factory.

The HR1 notices issued by the company authorise management to begin shedding workers after 45 days. Pladis have said they intend to fully close the site by 2022. According to the GMB Scotland trade union, the first redundancies will take place at the end of this year.

The notices demonstrate the company's contempt both for the workforce and the over 54,000 people who have signed a petition, rapidly organised by groups of McVitie's workers, against the factory's closure.

The HR1s also expose the Action Group of the Unite and GMB trade unions, Glasgow City Council, local enterprise agencies and the Scottish government, as a hopeless diversion and a fraud. Their aim is to tie McVitie's workers to a strategy based on appealing to Pladis and its profit margins while suppressing fundamental class issues.

By putting together a package of concessions from the workforce and tax handouts from government revenue, the Action Group hopes to entice Pladis to keep production in Glasgow. This would inevitably come at the expense of workers at another of Pladis' British production locations, such as Carlisle, Harlesden, Liverpool or Manchester, and the increased exploitation of all workers internationally. One idea floated was of a new factory nearby.

Pladis is clearly not interested. Not nearly enough baubles have been offered to interest the vastly profitable transnational, hence some calibrated outrage from trade union officials.

GMB Scotland organiser David Hume complained of an "act of extreme bad faith on the part of the Pladis

managing director David Murray and a gross insult to hundreds of workers and their families who are fighting for their livelihoods and community." Unite industrial officer Pat McIlvogue complained that Pladis' stance was a "disgrace" and bemoaned the company's refusal to "engage with the Action Group established by the Scottish government."

The bluster is all for show. Pladis' refusal to pretend to be interested in discussion exposes the bankruptcy of the Action Group strategy of appealing to the company for compromise.

Pladis is a wing of Turkish-owned Yildiz Holding. Yildiz acquired the McVitie's brand in 2014 when it bought United Biscuits. Pladis was established in 2016 to bring all Yildiz-owned confectionary producers under one umbrella. Besides biscuits, Yildiz produces over 300 brands of chocolate, cakes, chewing gum, frozen food, processed meat and personal care items. The vast company also has venture capital, retail and distribution wings.

Taken together, some 65,000 workers, including 51,000 in Turkey, labour daily in around 80 factories to enrich Yildiz's private owners. 63 percent of Yildiz Holding is owned by one man, Murat Ulker.

Since Yildiz took over United Biscuits, Ulker's personal worth has increased from \$2.9 billion in 2016 to \$6.3 billion. That is, every single Yildiz worker, including those at Tollcross, has over five years donated an average \$52,000 (£38,000) to Ulker's personal enrichment.

Ulker's obscene personal wealth did not stop the company re-organising \$5.5 billion of debts accrued in its expansion drive in 2018 and embarking on a programme of asset sales. One way or another, Tollcross workers' livelihoods are being sacrificed as part of this process.

The brutal global reality is that McVitie's workers' daily efforts, like those of workers in every industry, and in every country, make them part of a vastly complex, globally integrated web of production and distribution in which every company deploys modern technology to maximise profits at their expense. But these same conditions hand workers immense power as an interconnected social force on which all production depends.

The corporations therefore rely on the trade unions to divide workers in every country and every factory and workplace against each other. Their functionaries have degenerated into local gang bosses. The role of Unite or the GMB in Tollcross is to keep "their" factory open by increasing the rates of exploitation in Glasgow and leaving open the prospect of closing another factory in Carlisle, or Belgium, Egypt or Turkey.

The Scottish government and Glasgow City Council, both run by the Scottish National Party (SNP), have the same position. Neither want the factory to close, but both are committed to defending Pladis' profits. If they cannot offer the company enough concessions to keep the plant, they will set about applying the usual window dressing to its closure—task forces, action groups, employment advice and occasionally some token retraining. This has been seen repeatedly over the decades of sustained industrial destruction in Britain, which in the West of Scotland was particularly intense.

The SNP and the trade unions are assisted in this by pseudo-left groups such as the Scottish Socialist Party and the Socialist Party Scotland, whose position is that the Scottish government should nationalise the factory if and when Pladis close it. Such an unviable single plant operation would still be in global competition with Pladis and others. The job of ensuring the Tolcross workers' exploitation would simply be transferred to the Scottish government, until the plant could hopefully be offloaded back to the private sector at some point. This policy serves only to sow divisions in working class by promoting Scottish nationalism, while covering for the collaboration of the trade unions with the companies.

All these organisations are primarily concerned with preventing McVitie's from becoming a focal point in the class struggle. But this is precisely what is necessary for the Tolcross workers—the popular basis for which is indicated by the 54,000 signatures already

garnered by McVitie's workers.

The precondition for a broader, international struggle is a break with the trade unions and their suppression of workers fundamental interests. We urge McVitie's workers to consider these questions:

- Why has the Tollcross closure threat been presented as a surprise when it is clear the company has been opposing investment for years?
- Why have Unite and the GMB only called one small demonstration to protest the closure?
- Why is there no ballot for immediate strike action across Pladis plants against the job losses?
- Why have Unite and the GMB not sought to link opposition to the McVitie's closure with campaigns against the closure of library and community services in Glasgow and around Scotland, or with the many disputes emerging as pandemic support measures come to an end?

The World Socialist Web Site urges McVitie's workers to set up their own rank-and-file organisation, independent of the company and the union apparatus, tasked with taking up the struggle the unions oppose. The WSWs has launched the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to provide the necessary international framework and leadership for such struggles all over the world. Contact us today for more information.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact