

More details emerge of latest BCTGM sellout agreement with Frito-Lay

Marcus Day
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To contact the World Socialist Web Site to discuss organizing a rank-and-file strike committee, Frito-Lay workers can email fritolayrfc@gmail.com or text (785) 816-1505.

Yesterday more details emerged of the latest tentative agreement between snack food giant Frito-Lay and the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers union (BCTGM) at the company's plant in Topeka, Kansas, where 600 workers have been on strike since July 5.

After workers have already rejected four consecutive sellout contracts, the BCTGM is attempting to ram the deal through today before workers have had the chance to even look at the agreement. The vote today is being held only two days after the deal was announced. Workers have been provided no information on the agreement prior to the vote, with Frito-Lay stating that it was withholding details "at the request of the union."

However, as specific aspects of the proposal have begun to leak out in the press, it is clear why the union is seeking to keep the terms a secret until springing them on workers at the vote itself. In a number of respects, the contract is even worse than previous deals endorsed by the BCTGM, which workers have already voted down four times in a remarkable show of courage and determination.

On Thursday, local Topeka news station WIBW reported that it had acquired a copy of the contract proposal. Based on a review of its summary, the deal would maintain the low-wage regime at Frito-Lay, with insulting below-inflation raises, and keep in place the brutal long hours and mandatory overtime that workers have been striking to do away with.

Specifically, the contract would:

Include annual wage increases of just 3 percent in the first year and 1 percent in the second year. With

inflation in consumer goods running at 5.4 percent, this would entail an effective wage cut, after more than a decade in which workers have had their pay stagnate or frozen. The last deal included two inadequate 2 percent raises over two years—which the BCTGM itself proposed to the company.

- Eliminate the 60-hour cap on the amount of mandatory overtime included in the previous proposal. Instead, the contract proposal states that workers will be guaranteed their "sixth or seventh day of the workweek" off. Additionally, "suicide shifts," in which workers have only eight hours to commute and sleep between workdays with mandatory overtime, would be ended.

Even the miserly "guarantee" of a day or two off is shot through with loopholes. Workers would lose their guaranteed day(s) off if they refuse mandatory overtime or take time off earlier in the week, according to the proposal. In other words, the company would largely retain its ability to enforce 12-hour shifts more than five days a week, and would no doubt flaunt whatever minor restrictions are contained in the contract.

- Withdraw the BCTGM's grievance over the company's use of temporary and contract labor. Such contingent and highly exploited employment categories are becoming more and more the norm, increasingly with the blessing of the unions themselves.

Integrate the BCTGM even further into the structures of company management, through the creation of a six-person "labor-management committee" to make recommendations on staffing and overtime. Such corporatist bodies have long proliferated throughout the auto industry, where the United Auto Workers has for decades collaborated ever more closely with the companies to discipline workers, force through wage and job cuts, and oversee increasingly dangerous

workplaces.

Workers have already responded angrily on social media as terms of the deal have emerged. One wrote on Facebook, “It’s not a good deal at all! Frito wants us back on their leash to control our lives and still keep us away from our kids.” Another commented, “That’s the worst piece of junk I’ve ever seen.”

Workers should decisively reject this abysmal sellout, which fails to meet any of the workers’ demands for substantial pay increases and decent working conditions.

As we wrote yesterday in a statement calling for a “no” vote on the agreement: “Workers require a fighting organization which defends their interests as unrelentingly as the company pursues its.” This is not the BCTGM, which has worked throughout the contract negotiations to keep workers in the dark and push through the company’s demands, while starving workers on the picket lines with just \$105 a week in strike pay.

The WSWS urges workers at Frito-Lay to take the following steps to prepare a real struggle for their demands:

- The latest sellout contract proposal, worked out between the BCTGM and the company behind workers’ backs, must be overwhelmingly rejected.

- A rank-and-file strike committee must be founded, comprised of the most trusted and militant workers. Such a committee would formulate demands based on what workers actually need, such as a 25 percent across-the-board wage increase for all classifications, annual cost-of-living raises of 6 percent to make up for surging inflation, and an end to mandatory overtime over 40 hours.

- There must be an end to the BCTGM’s secrecy and backroom deals. Trusted delegates from the rank-and-file must oversee any future negotiations between the union and the company, and any new proposal must be released to the whole membership in its entirety at least a week before any vote.

- Workers must be provided the resources to place the strike on a serious footing. Strike pay must be raised from its current miserable amount of \$105 to the level of workers’ full pay, paid for out of the union international’s tens of millions in assets. Until the company restores workers’ health insurance, COBRA extended health coverage must be covered by the

BCTGM.

- The isolation of the strike imposed by the BCTGM must be broken. Workers in Topeka should appeal to the tens of thousands of Frito-Lay and Pepsi workers in the US and beyond to support their strike and prepare solidarity actions, up to and including a nationwide walkout to shut down Frito-Lay and PepsiCo’s operations. In recent weeks, Pepsi drivers in Indiana have walked out against efforts to raise health care costs, showing again that workers everywhere are facing the same basic issues.



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