

Unofficial tally shows large opposition remained

Bakery union says sellout contract ratified after Kansas Frito-Lay workers defeated four previous deals

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

Late Friday night, the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers union (BCTGM) announced the passage of its latest tentative agreement with snack food giant Frito-Lay covering 600 workers at the company's plant in Topeka, Kansas. Workers, who have been on strike since July 5, are expected to return to work on Monday.

The union sent out a mass text to workers which read, "The members of local 218 have voted to accept the latest company offer. Each member of local 218 should be proud. Strike is over."

The BCTGM has not publicly released any vote totals or percentages. However, a worker told the WSWS that an unofficial tally circulated on Facebook showed 200 votes in favor and 178 opposed, which, if it is accurate, is a narrow margin of just 53-47 percent, or 22 votes.

The ratification of the contract by workers is not an endorsement of the sellout agreement, let alone the BCTGM. The workers rejected four previous sellout proposals. The deal was only rammed through because the BCTGM called a snap vote just two days after the deal was announced and provided no information on the agreement, with Frito-Lay management saying it was withholding details "at the request of the union." Knowing the union would not come back with anything better, and facing increasing economic pressure due to the miserable strike benefits provided by the BCTGM, it appears that workers reluctantly voted for the deal.

One striking worker told the WSWS, "A 'yes' vote means workers voted to approve the contract because they had no other choice. They had to get back to work to feed their families, pay their mortgages, their bills. The union paid us only \$105 a week and literally starved us into accepting the latest offer."

On Thursday, local Topeka news station WIBW reported that it had obtained details of the contract proposal. According to its summary, the new contract will maintain the low-wage pay at Frito-Lay, with below-inflation raises, and maintain the terribly long hours and mandatory overtime that workers walked out to end.

Annual wage increases in the new contract will be 3 percent in the first year and 1 percent in the second year. This will be eaten away by the current inflation in consumer goods of 5.4 percent. The previous deal included two inadequate 2 percent raises over two years—which the BCTGM itself proposed to the company. The total percentage in raises, in the end, is identical to the previously voted down contract.

The 60-hour cap on the amount of mandatory overtime included in the previous contract proposal is eliminated. The new agreement states that workers will be guaranteed their "sixth or seventh day of the workweek" off. "Suicide shifts," in which workers have only eight hours to travel to work and sleep between workdays with mandatory overtime, are supposedly ended. However, the "guarantee" of a day or two off is no guarantee at all. Workers can lose their guaranteed day(s) off if they decline mandatory overtime or take time off earlier in the week.

The BCTGM's grievance over the company's use of temporary and contract labor was withdrawn. In the past, these highly exploited workers were used by Frito-Lay not to assist full-time employees but to increase production by having them work alongside them.

The new contract further integrates the BCTGM into company management, through the establishment of a six-person "labor-management committee" to make recommendations on staffing and overtime. As the WSWS previously noted, "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."

The BCTGM bears full responsibility for the passing of the agreement. The contract will not alleviate the brutal working conditions, and in the next contract negotiations, the BCTGM will feign amnesia as it denounces working conditions it agreed to and enforced.

This fight is far from over. Workers should take these experiences as a lesson and draw the necessary conclusions. The biggest obstacle blocking workers from conducting an effective struggle against PepsiCo was the BCTGM itself. As the WSWS warned, "The union does not want to strike, and it does not want to spend its money on it. It is seeking to starve the strike by forcing workers to live on poverty wages and force them to accept a concessionary contract."

This has been the experience in one struggle after the other. On July 14, the United Auto Workers union shut down the five-week strike by nearly 3,000 Volvo Trucks workers in Dublin, Virginia, after forcing workers to revote on a third tentative agreement, which included higher out-of-pocket healthcare costs and below-inflation raises. On July 13, the United Steelworkers sabotaged and shut down the more than three-month strike by ATI steelworkers in Pennsylvania and other states and imposed a contract with similar concessions. Finally, the United Mine Workers and the Massachusetts Nurses Association have isolated months-long strikes by Warrior Met Coal miners in Alabama and nurses at St. Vincent Hospital and Worcester, Massachusetts.

The corporatist unions represent the corporations, not the workers. That is why new organizations of struggle,

democratically controlled by the workers themselves, must be built to fight for what workers need, not what the giant corporations like PepsiCo and the pro-company unions claim is affordable. The Frito-Lay workers should follow the example of the Volvo Trucks workers, who formed the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee to oppose the sabotage of the UAW, provide a real voice and real leadership to Volvo workers.

Frito-Lay workers have many powerful allies. A Frito-Lay Rank-and-File Committee will join the growing network of rank-and-file committees of Amazon workers, educators, autoworkers and other workers. This network will be the catalyst for a powerful international movement of the working class to stop and reverse the corporate attacks on workers everywhere.

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