

# GMB and Unite launch bogus bid to “save” McVitie's Glasgow biscuit factory

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The GMB and Unite trade unions, the Scottish National Party government and SNP-run Glasgow City Council, along with business groups, have issued a begging letter to Turkish-owned Pladis food group to save 472 threatened jobs at its McVitie's biscuit factory in Tollcross, Glasgow.

The central aim of the Pladis Action Group's appeal is to divert mass opposition to the closure among McVitie's workers and the wider community, behind a campaign to convince the giant transnational to retain investment in Scotland and thereby secure the interests of the trade union apparatus and the Scottish ruling elite.

According to financial analysis by Glasgow City Council, the closure will cost the local economy £50 million per year, cutting nearly 500 jobs at the plant and a total of 864 full-time equivalent jobs, including those within the supply chain and the local economy. It will reap social devastation in the impoverished working class area of Glasgow's East End, which has been blighted by decades of de-industrialisation and austerity. Over 80,000 people have signed a petition calling for the plant to be kept open.

Only the action group members and Pladis' management know the full content of the proposals, which have not been made available to McVitie's workers. Press reports suggest that it involves closing the current factory, built in 1925, possibly selling off the land on which it stands, and using cash accrued to build another plant nearby in the Clyde Gateway regeneration area covering Bridgeton, Dalmarnock and Rutherglen. The proposal is being sold to Pladis as potentially more profitable than its current intention to close the Glasgow plant in the second half of 2022 and shift production to other UK based locations, including Carlisle, Manchester and Harlesden. Pladis intends to

shut the Glasgow plant, citing “excess capacity” at its UK sites.

The proposal underscores the role of the trade unions as partners in workers' ever greater exploitation and the main instrument serving to divide workers on national, regional and workplace lines.

There is no information regarding:

- how many, if any, of the current workforce will be retained under the proposal
- what wages and conditions workers will be offered
- what is proposed to happen to workers between the current factory closing and being sold off, and a new one being built
- how much taxpayers' cash is going to be handed over to Pladis as a sweetener in return for it ditching reorganisation plans. Pladis is already in receipt of £1 million of public cash, handed over in 2014, for no obvious return.

Nor has any impact assessment been released of the plan on other McVitie's and Pladis workers. Instead, trade union officials and the SNP are appealing purely to Pladis' bottom line. GMB Scotland organiser David Hume told the *Sunday Post*, “We believe the proposal offers Pladis everything it needs to maintain manufacturing in the east end of Glasgow for the next generation, ensuring employment and opportunity for the local community that depends on it.”

Unite industrial officer Pat McIlvogue echoed Hume, pledging that a new factory “will produce efficiency savings and make this one of the most advanced biscuit manufacturing sites in the UK.”

McIlvogue reiterated the basic falsehood on which the entire trade union pitch is based. “Unite is asking that Pladis the owners of the factory study and positively engage with us on this proposal because we believe that everyone can win from this most

importantly the hundreds of jobs at stake in the local community.”

Everybody wins? But the basic operations of capitalism dictate that if Pladis and its multi-billionaire owner 'wins', through being able to extract more profit from its global workforce than under current arrangements, then workers lose—either by facing higher levels of exploitation in the factories kept open, or by losing their jobs. For the GMB and Unite, a new, super exploitative factory in Glasgow, forcing the closure of an older plant in say, Manchester, with hundreds of jobs lost there, would count as a 'win'.

The announcement follows weeks in which the trade unions, and their allies in the Scottish pseudo-left, have worked to divert workers at the factory and their supporters from launching a serious struggle to defend jobs based on an appeal to McVitie's workers in Britain and across Pladis' global operation and the broadest layers of the working class. No strike ballot has been called, or even any proposal for industrial action, in Tollcross or anywhere. No appeal has been made by the unions to any McVitie's workers outside of Glasgow.

Instead, while production has continued at all McVitie's plants, the GMB and Unite took to flag waving, while absurdly threatening to campaign for a Scotland only consumer boycott of McVitie's biscuits. The GMB's Hume said Pladis' "Managing director David Murray is intent on his company turning its back on Scotland and it is understandable that, for as long as the factory is under threat, the people of Scotland may exercise their considerable consumer power and turn their back on McVitie's products."

As part of this 'campaign', customers of retail giant Marks and Spencer (M&S) were encouraged to write to M&S CEO Steve Rowe demanding he lend his support in keeping open the Tollcross plant. M&S sells rebranded McVitie's biscuits. This bankrupt appeal is being made to the same Rowe who last year organised 7,000 job losses from M&S's 78,000 workforce, and earlier this year threatened thousands more if his company was not handed business rate concessions by the Conservative government.

This did not stop Scottish Socialist Party industrial organiser Ritchie Venton from calling on Rowe to solidarise with McVitie's workers! Venton posted to the Scottish Workers Solidarity Network Facebook page, 'There is no middle road for the M&S bosses. They

either side with the workers and demand that the multinational Pladis profiteers who own McVitie's halt this closure, or the reputation of Marks and Spencer will be tarnished along with that of the Pladis bosses.'

Aside from defending the "reputation" of M&S, Venton endorsed calls from the unions for Glasgow City Council to block any planning application to build flats on the site of the McVitie's factory, should it be demolished without Pladis approval for a new factory. This is as close as Venton and the unions come to suggesting that Pladis should bear any sanction whatsoever for its decision to wreck hundreds of workers livelihoods, pitching families and whole communities into deep uncertainty and poverty.

There is no way forward for McVitie's workers with these organisations, or their left talking apologists. The transformation of the nationally-based and pro-capitalist trade unions into corporate allies is an international phenomenon rooted in the globalisation of the production process and cannot be reversed. Scotland has seen countless factory closures where struggles were diverted behind campaigns designed to appeal to corporate social responsibility.

Workers at McVitie's are posed with developing the means and organisations of struggle in defence of jobs and living standards in which their interests take precedence over the profit imperatives of Pladis. The first step must be the formation of a rank-and-file committee, organised independently of the trade unions. The Socialist Equality Party urges workers to study the call of the International Committee for an International Workers Alliance of Rank and File Committees and contact us to discuss the fight ahead.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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