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, 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:
wsws.org/contact

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