

“We worked 16 hours a day during the pandemic”

## Nabisco strike across four states continues with wide support

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*The World Socialist Web Site will assist in the formation of a Nabisco workers rank-and-file committee. Text (773) 234-7135 or write to [contact@wsws.org](mailto:contact@wsws.org) to learn more.*

Over 1,000 bakery workers continued to strike across four states over the weekend in Chicago, Illinois; Portland, Oregon; Richmond, Virginia; and Aurora, Colorado. The workers are fighting against the demands of Nabisco’s parent company, multinational Chicago-based food conglomerate Mondelez, to impose concessions and brutal working conditions.

The strike began when 200 workers walked out on August 10 in Portland, Oregon. On Saturday, hundreds of workers rallied in front of the Portland plant to support the striking workers. Last week, 345 workers in the Chicago plant and 25 workers at the distribution center in Addison, Illinois joined the strike. The Nabisco workers strike is part of a broader rebellion of workers across the country against social inequality and the pandemic, from Frito-Lay/Pepsi workers to Volvo autoworkers, auto mechanics, teachers, and nurses, and unrest among Deere workers.

Mondelez is proposing a four-year contract and demanding workers accept a change in overtime a new Alternative Work Schedule (AWS) which would eliminate overtime after eight hours, and a two-tier health care plan. During the pandemic, workers have been forced to work 12 to 16-hour shifts. Workers could lose tens of thousands of dollars a year from their overtime pay in such a scheme.

The health care plan that it is also proposing for the new contract is one the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers (BCTGM) union has already imposed on workers in the Naperville, Illinois bakery facility, which has a separate contract. The concessions that the union accepted there include higher out-of-pocket costs by workers.

Mondelez, which operates in over 160 countries, made over \$3.6 billion in profits off its global workforce in 2020 in the midst of the pandemic. In 2016, Mondelez laid off hundreds of workers across the country and shut down

production lines in Chicago, laying off 400 workers. Last month, it shut down Nabisco facilities in Atlanta, Georgia and Fair Lawn, New Jersey. In total, over 1,000 jobs have been slashed in the last five years, which the BCTGM did nothing to stop. Conditions for workers in Nabisco facilities in other countries, including Mexico, are just as brutal, with pay as low as \$2 an hour and high turnover.

While Nabisco workers are seeking to fight, the BCTGM is isolating their struggle while imposing concessions on workers in other facilities and industries. Workers at Frito-Lay in Kansas had a sellout contract imposed on them by the BCTGM after a 28 day strike and four consecutive rejected agreements.

The BCTGM has done nothing to stop the attack on Nabisco workers’ pensions, thousands of layoffs, plant closures or health care. The union has also accepted health care concessions in Naperville, which the company is banking on to impose upon workers across the country.

Nabisco workers have widespread support throughout the country and internationally, but they should put no trust in the BCTGM to fight for their interests. Instead, they should follow the example of Volvo workers, who formed a rank-and-file committee to oppose the sellout of their strike by the United Auto Workers.

Reporters from the WSWs spoke to Nabisco workers at the Southside Chicago plant, who make Wheat Thins, Nutter Butter and Belvita products. Maggie, a worker with more than two decades at the company, said, “I don’t want to work 12 hours a day. I want my 40 hours and if I want to work the weekend, I get paid for my premium pay.

“We would lose \$10,000 or more a year [under the new AWS]. Saturday and Sunday, that’s where we get our money. A lot of times I go in early. That’s 12 hours. I get time and a half for those 4 hours over. I don’t want twelve hours in my four hours of regular time. That makes no sense to me.

She also spoke out against the two-tier health care

proposal “We are all working in the same plant. Why can’t we get treated equally? How can you get them with different health care plans or for a different work schedule? They sayin’ well, ‘we’re just doing this to the new people.’ No, I don’t like that! Treat them the same. I may have my son try to get a job here. I don’t want him to get treated like that. The next generation is going to get treated worse and worse.

“They previously took our pensions and said they were going to put the money in our 401(k). To me that’s not enough. You say you’re going to give me X number of dollars. But it sure is adding up kinda slowly considering I’m already up in age by the time I’m ready to get my pensions, I won’t have that money they said I would have. I don’t believe anything they say, if you ask me.”

In 2016, more than half of the production lines were cut at the facility. “They cut all the Oreo lines, a Ritz line, a Graham Cracker line and a Chicken in a Biskit line,” Maggie said. “Now we have Wheat Thins and Nutter Butter and Belvita. Line 6 is a Wheat Thins. Line 4 is a Wheat Thins. Line 6 is a ‘super line’ they call it. But it’s really a ‘Super break down all the time’ line. The line is not holding up for what it is supposed to be. It puts out a lot, but it puts out a lot of garbage, too.”

The Chicago plant, which is one of the largest industrial bakeries in the world, is falling apart, Maggie said, due to a lack of investments. “I haven’t seen anything done to the plant [in years]. They used to do a little work like painting the floors and the walls and fixing stuff. Now they don’t do any of that.

“They claim they are not making the money. You don’t want us to make money when you make all the money and get all the bonuses? Why not help the little person? The person that makes their profits? Give us a bonus! We’re doing the work!

“During the pandemic we never really left. We worked all the time. I went out for two weeks a couple times. But while I was working we worked 12 hours a day. We came to work every day. Some companies closed down but we were sent to work, seven days a week.

“Yes, we broke down. We’re tired. Look at me. Since we’ve been here, there’s been a lot of people with knee problems and shoulder problems. The company tore us up. And we still push on.”

Another worker told the WSWs, “We’re fighting for our eight hour shifts. We’re used to eight hour shifts and they want us to do twelve hours shifts. We’re short staffed. And they’re trying to take our health care. They want us to pay for health care. They want to take our overtime on weekends. Saturday we get time and a half. Sunday we get double time. If people don’t come to work, they want to bring temps in.

“They’re forcing us to work 16 hours to do this job. We’re short staffed. We don’t get bonuses. They made us work through the pandemic –16 hours every day. It started in March of 2020. We just won a battle of getting our sick days through the ordinance of Chicago that went into effect in 2016. They wouldn’t give us our sick days. We just finally won a couple months ago.

“We’re fighting for respect. They don’t give us respect. When we’re out here on the weekends, they’re at home. If you force us to work 16 hours, where is Human Resources? They’re working from home.

“We had a whole line get sick, the Belvita line. We said, ‘How about you just shut the plant down so we can all quarantine?’ But they didn’t do that. They didn’t tell us who got sick. We had to assume. We learned from our coworkers who were sick and we had to tell each other. Why would we allow you to come to work? No, stay home! We all have families, grandkids, husbands – we don’t want our loved ones to get sick. We were dropping off Gatorade and water and supporting each other.

“I’ve worked here 26 years, straight out of high school. After two years, they laid us off. I had two kids. The 2016 layoffs were the worst. They took our Oreo and Ritz lines from us. They are our big moneymaker lines. They sent the lines to Mexico and they’re getting paid \$2 per hour. They have the biggest turnover rate in Mexico and they are getting no benefits.

“I think everybody deserves better pay. We’re all Nabisco. People in Mexico deserve better pay. The 2016 layoffs were the worst feeling ever. Over 400 people were laid off then. It was a lot. We stood there watching them turn their stuff in. It broke our hearts. It was horrible.

“When they walked out in 2016 to cut jobs, they gave the CEO a golden package. They made so much money and we don’t get bonuses.”



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