

Nabisco bakery and distribution center strikes spread nationwide in US

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Nabisco bakery workers in Norcross, Georgia have gone on strike, joining striking Nabisco workers in Portland, Oregon; Aurora, Colorado; Richmond, Virginia; and Chicago, Illinois. All Nabisco production and distribution centers in the US are now on strike. These workers are struggling against brutal working conditions, low pay, and the introduction of a two-tier health care system which forces health care costs onto workers' shoulders. These struggles are taking place as Nabisco has raked in record profits.

Well over 1,000 Nabisco workers are now on strike across the US against Nabisco and its parent company, Mondelez International. Over 200 Nabisco workers in Portland, Oregon were the first to go on strike August 10. The Nabisco strike is part of a growing workers rebellion that spans numerous industries.

The strike by Nabisco workers was preceded by a strike of Frito-Lay workers in Kansas and Indiana over low wages, grueling shifts lasting 12-16 hours, and a sharp rise in health care costs. These struggles were ruthlessly betrayed by the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers (BCTGM) union. A Topeka Frito-Lay worker informed the *World Socialist Web Site* that "the union [BCTGM] paid us only \$105 a week and literally starved us into accepting the latest offer." In fact, the new contract forced through on July 23 by BCTGM further integrates the union into company management through the establishment of a six-person "labor-management committee" to make recommendations on staffing and overtime.

The striking Nabisco workers have been forced to work 12 to 16 hour shifts, seven days a week, as the Delta variant of the coronavirus has been allowed to rip through the population. Mondelez is now demanding that workers accept the auto industry's "Alternative

Work Schedule," which forces workers to adopt 16-hour shifts without any overtime pay. Mondelez International is also demanding that workers pay more for health care.

In 2016, Mondelez International threatened to move all production to Salinas, Mexico unless the BCTGM imposed \$26 million in concessions on the Nabisco workforce in Chicago. That same year, Mondelez cut one half the jobs at the Chicago plant and closed the Fairlawn, New Jersey, and Atlanta, Georgia, plants. Over 1,000 jobs were eliminated.

The BCTGM did nothing to stop the closure of these plants, or the loss of over 400 jobs in Chicago. Security was called in and Chicago Nabisco workers were escorted out of the plant, while the BCTGM did not offer one word of protest or a strategy to fight back.

At the beginning of the Nabisco strike on August 10 in Portland, BCTGM vice president Mike Burlingham addressed the striking workers and laid out the union's intentions. "This is a fight for the American middle class," Burlingham said. "We're fighting to maintain what we already have. We're not coming to the table asking for things, we're coming to the table saying just leave things alone."

"Just leave things alone" is not what workers want. In fact, this "union" is trying to sell out the US Nabisco workers by demagogically portraying Mexican workers as the enemy. The BCTGM, which falsely claims to represent Nabisco workers, states on its website that its aim is to convince Nabisco to "stop exporting jobs to Mexico."

In fact what is needed is a common struggle with brother workers in Mexico against all attempts to divide and conquer. The stirring up of anti-Mexican prejudice only plays into the hands of the company and weakens the fight by workers. Nabisco workers in the

US have more in common with their Mexican working class brothers and sisters than with the well-heeled American “union” bureaucrats whose only job is to keep workers in line. What is needed instead is to extend the battle across national borders and cripple Mondelez’s operations on a global scale.

Mondelez International has responded to the strikes by indicating its “disappointment,” but says it is confident that the strikes are not expected to disrupt production at the facilities. Mondelez saw profits of \$3.6 billion in 2020 on revenue of \$26.6 billion.

BCTGM Local 364 in Portland, Oregon negotiated with Mondelez International for three weeks before the strike was launched on August 10. These backroom negotiations, are being kept out of sight of rank-and-file workers, who have no say or input. A genuine working class organization would involve workers directly in the bargaining process, and would publicly announce the details of every step of the bargaining process.

Rather than fighting in workers interests, the union has systematically collaborated in the slashing of jobs and workers’ wages for decades. Francesca, the daughter of a Chicago Nabisco worker explained, “My dad told me stories of how back when he first started work at Nabisco in 1960 there were over 4,000 people. Now it’s just a few hundred.”

Michael, a former Chicago Nabisco worker, took to social media to declare his support. “I stand with you in your stand against corporate greed,” he said. “Please be aware that the current buildings you work in are old, and to reinvest in them might be the perfect excuse along with union negotiations that failed to set the ball in motion to let Mondelez close them!”

The role of the AFL-CIO and BCTGM is to work for the shutting down of the strike and the imposition of a management-friendly deal as soon as possible. The union bureaucracy is determined to let nothing disrupt their cozy relationship with management, which has fattened the union coffers at the expense of workers.

The Nabisco strikes that are taking place across the US demonstrate to all the world the workers’ willingness to fight a determined struggle against the capitalist class. But Nabisco workers must come to understand that they are fighting a struggle on two fronts. They are fighting against Mondelez International and the BCTGM functionaries.

To wage this two-front struggle, it is necessary to

organize workers into democratic rank-and-file committees independent of the “union.” The Nabisco workers must learn the lessons of the Volvo strike. It is not possible for Nabisco workers to advance a fight for their own demands so long as the BCTGM strangles their struggles and can pretend to speak for workers.

The *World Socialist Web Site* will assist in the formation of such a committee. Send a text to (785) 816-1505 or fill out the contact form at wsws.org/workers to learn more.



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