

Nabisco workers strike in five states faces turning point

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More than 1,050 Nabisco bakery and sales distribution workers are currently on strike in five states against the multinational Chicago-based food conglomerate Mondelez. While striking workers in Oregon, Illinois, Colorado, Virginia, and Georgia want to fight hellish working conditions and attacks on their living standards, their struggle is at a crucial juncture which pits them against both the company and the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers (BCTGM) union.

After the union kept the workers on the job without a contract for months, over 200 workers began a strike at the Nabisco bakery in Portland, Oregon on August 10. They were joined by striking workers in bakeries in Richmond, Virginia and Chicago, Illinois. Workers also struck at the Nabisco sales distribution centers in Aurora, Colorado; Addison, Illinois, and just recently were joined by workers in Norcross, Georgia, near Atlanta. This is the first nationwide strike at Nabisco since a strike in 1969 which lasted 56 days.

Workers in the Naperville, Illinois facility, which produces Triscuits, have a separate contract, and were forced to accept health care plans with higher out-of-pocket costs by the BCTGM.

Mondelez is proposing a four-year contract to the Nabisco workers which would significantly curtail overtime pay, impose an Alternative Work Schedule (AWS) and put newer workers on a two-tier health care plan.

The conditions at Nabisco are horrific. One striking worker at the industrial bakery in Chicago told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “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.” A number of workers said their knees and bodies were getting destroyed from

working up to 80 hours or more a week at the plants.

“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.”

However, these conditions have been enforced for years with the backing of the BCTGM. The union has for years allowed the company to carry out mass job layoffs, pension and health care cuts, plant closures and impose brutal working conditions.

In 2016, the BCTGM did nothing to oppose hundreds of layoffs at the Nabisco facility in Chicago, which once had more than 4,000 employees. Plants in Fair Lawn, New Jersey and Atlanta were also closed without the union lifting a finger. Instead, the BCTGM sought to whip up nationalist poison, blaming Mexican workers and “offshoring” to divide the US workers from their brothers and sisters in the 160 countries where the company operates.

That 80-hour workweeks are not only possible, but increasingly common in union shops such as Nabisco, shows the extent to which the unions have been transformed into little more than arms of management. The conditions at Nabisco will sound more than familiar to Dana auto parts workers, where working for weeks without a single day off is enshrined in the language of the contracts “bargained” by the United Auto Workers and the United Steelworkers. Now, Dana workers are faced with a vote this Sunday on a contract about which the unions are concealing all information from them.

That a nationwide strike is taking place at Nabisco is a testament to the overwhelming anger and determination to fight among workers. The BCTGM

was compelled to call out the plants in piecemeal fashion only weeks after it had finally rammed through a sellout deal to end a strike at Frito-Lay in Topeka, Kansas. The union was compelled to call the strike, which lasted for 20 days, only after workers had rebelled and voted down four consecutive tentative agreements.

The BCTGM-imposed contract maintained low wages, below-inflation raises, brutally long workweeks and mandatory overtime, while resolving none of the demands of workers. Frito-Lay, and its parent company Pepsi, were also able to maintain brutal 12-hour shifts and impose a sellout contract on the workers. As the WSWS previously reported, the union also created labor-management committees with Frito-Lay that “integrate the BCTGM even further into the structures of company management.”

A sharp warning must be made: the BCTGM is seeking to isolate and wear down the strike in order to betray it. To date, the union has provided virtually no information about even the status of negotiations. Meanwhile, it is starving workers out on the picket line with meager strike pay, and many have been forced to turn to crowdfunding site Gofundme to make ends meet.

The Nabisco strike can be won. But to accomplish this, striking workers need a strategy for victory. They must move now to take the initiative into their own hands, and not wait for the BCTGM to bring another sellout.

The WSWS urges Nabisco workers to form an independent rank-and-file strike committee, composed of the most trusted and militant rank-and-file workers, and formulate their own demands for the strike. We propose these demands include: an end to the AWS proposal and a return to the eight-hour day, a 25 percent across-the-board wage increase with cost of living adjustments to keep up with inflation, the full restoration of pensions and the rejection of the two-tier health care plan.

Furthermore, workers must take the conduct of the strike into their own hands. They must demand that they be provisioned with strike pay equal to their full wages, paid for out of the \$34.6 million in assets which the union squanders on six-figure salaries for top officials such as president David Durkee. They must also demand an end to secret negotiations, with all

sessions livestreamed over the internet. Lastly, they must fight to expand support for the strike, appealing to other sections of the working class, including striking mechanics in Chicago, auto parts workers at Dana, teachers and others.

The *World Socialist Web Site* will do everything it can to assist in the formation of a rank-and-file strike committee. Text (773) 234-7135, or fill out the contact form at wsws.org/workers to learn more.



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