

BCTGM seeks to betray strike of Nabisco workers across the US

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Well over 1,050 Nabisco workers are on now strike against the multinational food corporation Mondelez, formerly Kraft. The pressure from workers to strike was so great that the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers union (BCTGM) was forced to allow strikes to go forward across all Nabisco production facilities. Nabisco workers in Oregon, Illinois, Colorado, Virginia and Georgia are currently struggling against horrific working conditions.

One striking Chicago worker informed the *World Socialist Web Site* that “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.” Workers have had to work nearly every weekend, pay higher premiums and co-pays on health insurance, and accept permanent pension freezes.

Portland, Oregon Nabisco workers had been working without a contract for months before BCTGM Local 364 acceded to workers’ demands for a strike. Nabisco workers in Richmond Virginia had been working without a contract since May before a strike was called August 16.

Mondelez is seeking to impose a four-year contract that would place newer workers on a two-tier health care plan, implement an Alternative Work Schedule (AWS), and severely limit overtime pay.

In a further provocation, Mondelez cut off health care benefits from striking workers and their families on August 31.

When asked about working throughout the pandemic workers described terrifying conditions. One said, “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.”

The BCTGM union has ensured that management workers are employed under very different conditions. April Flowers-Lewis, a BCTGM steward speaking to the organization “More Perfect Union,” explained that employees in human resources and management have weekends off, and enjoy eight-hour days. This is an effort by Mondelez to divide workers and has been totally unopposed by the union. The fact that BCTGM has allowed for such massive disparities is an indictment of this pro-corporate “union.”

The union has sought to scapegoat Mexican workers for the elimination of jobs while not lifting a finger in 2016, when hundreds of Nabisco employees were laid off. That same year, plants in New Jersey and Georgia were also closed without the union even threatening a strike. While falsely portraying workers in Mexico as the enemy, in reality, Mexican and US workers are facing very similar conditions, and are pitted in common battle against the same billionaires.

The fact that US Nabisco workers have been forced to work 16-hour shifts, without overtime pay or weekends off, in hot bakeries and in the middle of a pandemic that is ripping through the population, is an exposure of the bankruptcy of the BCTGM.

When finally forced to call a strike, the “union” only allowed one workplace at a time to walk out and only when it was understood that Nabisco workers were ready to strike with or without the union’s permission.

Frito-Lay workers in Topeka, Kansas under BCTGM walked out on strike after rejecting four consecutive contract agreements that had been endorsed by the union. After a 20-day strike, the BCTGM forced through a contract that met none of the workers’ needs or demands.

During the strike, various pseudo-left organizations

have professed support for the workers, but in fact have lined up with the union bureaucrats against the workers. The Portland DSA for example has done nothing to warn Nabisco workers about the union's plans to sell out the strike. In fact, they have shown up at the Portland strike location every Saturday since the strike began primarily to bolster the credibility of the BCTGM, an organization that works hand in glove with Mondelez corporate management.

April Flowers-Lewis, again speaking to More Perfect Union, voiced her elemental feeling of solidarity with Mexican workers, stating, "and they're paying them (Mexican workers) less, and working harder as well, which is not fair to them as well." The BCTGM is not only hostile to Mexican Nabisco workers, but is actively attempting to place the blame for the terrible working conditions in the US on the shoulders of Mexican workers.

Instead of seeking common cause with Mexican workers against Mondelez, the BCTGM has called for a reactionary and nationalist boycott of Nabisco products that are made in Mexico. This divisive strategy plays into the hands of management under conditions where a multinational corporation such as Mondelez can move production to any corner of the globe.

Moreover, the content of backroom negotiations between Mondelez and the union are being kept hidden from workers. Workers are not only being kept in the dark, but are receiving such meager strike pay that they have been forced to use sites such as Gofundme to make ends meet.

The BCTGM's nationalist orientation plays into the hands of the company. This is not a struggle between Mexican workers and US workers. This is a fight to organize the working class internationally against an international capitalist class.

Nabisco workers face a struggle on two fronts, against Mondelez and the BCTGM. It is only by forming independent rank-and-file committees, controlled democratically by the workers themselves, that Nabisco workers can organize a real fight. These committees should draw up demands based on the needs of workers. They must broaden the struggle, reaching out to their Mexican working class brothers and sisters and Mondelez workers globally as well as fellow food industry workers across the US.



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