

Nabisco workers strike enters second month, as company and BCTGM union plot attacks on pay and health care

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The strike by Nabisco food production workers entered its second month Friday, with workers determined to win substantial improvements to pay and working conditions. The walkout first began August 10 in Portland, Oregon, spreading the following week to factories and distribution centers in Richmond, Virginia, and Aurora, Colorado, and subsequently to two facilities in the Chicago area and one in Norcross, Georgia.

On September 8, the most recent contract offer by Mondelez International, Nabisco's parent company, to the Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union (BCTGM) nominally expired. In-person talks are set to resume between Mondelez and the BCTGM on Monday. However, the so-called "negotiations" will not be between two adversaries. Rather, they will be strategy sessions between the company and its union "partners" over how to secure the company's demands for major concessions, in line with the BCTGM's sellout of the recent strike at Frito-Lay in Topeka, Kansas.

Mondelez's latest proposal was nearly identical to its initial offer preceding the strike. With the proposed four-year agreement, the company is attempting to push through an "Alternative Work Schedule," similar to that in the auto industry, that would see workers endure grueling 12-hour shifts while virtually eliminating overtime pay over eight hours.

The company has made only minor changes to the language of its Alternative Work Schedule clause. The new wording supposedly limits the schedule to "select high demand production lines." This language is sufficiently vague that it can be made to apply to lines at the company's whim, allowing it to pump out goods

24/7 while reducing its overtime pay to workers.

A two-tier health care plan would require new hires to pay premiums and copays that current workers do not. The contract would only include a paltry 2.25 percent wage increase in the first year and a \$1.80-an-hour raise over the next three years, well below the rapidly rising inflation rate, entailing a cut in real pay for workers.

This assault on workers' wages comes on the heels of Nabisco nearly doubling its profits during the COVID-19 pandemic by forcing workers to risk their lives on production lines for up to 16 hours a day for months on end. As one of the striking workers in Richmond, Virginia, recently posted online, "We risked our lives working through the pandemic every single day almost with no compensation. We saved them from closing and they made BILLIONS in profits."

In an effort to sell what is essentially the same contract that led workers to go to out on strike, Nabisco is dangling a one-time \$5,000 ratification bonus, much of which would be eaten up by taxes.

The conflict between Nabisco and workers has grown especially intense in Portland, Oregon. On August 31, Mondelez sent a cease-and-desist letter threatening legal action against striking workers for interfering with production at its Portland bakery. On September 2, the company called the police to evict strikers from a rail line leading into the plant where Union Pacific workers, in a show of solidarity, refused to cross the picket line, preventing the delivery of sugar, flour and cooking oil to the facility. Attorneys for Mondelez claim that these actions violate Oregon state law regarding labor disputes.

While rank-and-file Nabisco workers have faced harassment from police and private security on the

picket line, BCTGM President Anthony Shelton, along with other union bosses, including Liz Shuler, the new head of the AFL-CIO, met this week in Washington for a Labor Day event hosted by the White House. At the event, President Biden paid lip service to the gains made by workers' past struggles, including the eight-hour day, while falsely portraying the union executives in the audience as representatives in the ongoing struggle for workers rights.

In reality, the union heads in attendance earn six-figure salaries, and no doubt include not a few multi-millionaires. Shelton, for example, took in compensation of \$288,502 last year. He and his counterparts are well compensated for what Biden told them was the "incredible value you bring to the safety, security and growth of the economy" —in other words, for the "safety and security" they provide for profit-making and corporate interests.

The union bureaucrats naturally reciprocated Biden's endorsement. The official Facebook account of BCTGM posted a photo of Shelton and Biden posing together at the event, while noting in a caption that AFL-CIO President Shuler had "thanked the President for leading the most pro-worker, pro-Union administration in history." Despite their grandiose claims, neither Biden nor the unions in attendance are "pro-worker." For decades unions like the BCTGM have overseen concessions contracts that have stripped away more and more of the gains Biden referred to in his speech, while Biden himself has served a shill for corporate interests throughout his long political career.

The event was only the latest attempt by the Biden administration and union bosses to shore up the increasingly hated pro-corporate unions in the face of growing rank-and-file rebellions. There is a growing mood of militancy among workers in the US, as well as increasing signs of solidarity among workers in different industries. But more militant activity is not itself enough. Workers must break free from the unions and the pro-corporate and nationalist straitjacket which they impose on workers' struggles.

Official strike materials produced by BCTGM displayed on Nabisco picket lines included leaflets reading "Nabisco no longer in our corner. Selling American workers out to Mexico," and a banner calling for a boycott of Nabisco products because the company was "moving thousands of American jobs to Mexico!

Simply out of corporate greed!!" "No more Oreos made in Mexico!" is a common chant promoted by the union.

Such nationalist poison, the stock-in-trade of the US trade union bureaucracy, is aimed at pitting workers in America against their brothers and sisters in Mexico, who are exploited by the same company and who share the same interests for good-paying jobs and decent working conditions. At the same time, it is designed to line up workers in the US behind "their" corporate exploiters and the capitalist state, and cover up the deep class divisions within American society.

It is vital that Nabisco workers in the US oppose this scapegoating of their Mexican counterparts, and instead extend a hand to their fellow workers across the border, appealing for a united struggle against corporate exploitation. To do so, workers must take the fight against Nabisco into their own hands and out of the hands of the "unions," which today only exist to do the bidding of corporations. Rank-and-file committees must be formed like those that have already taken shape among Dana auto parts workers and workers at Volvo's New River Valley Truck Plant in Dublin, Virginia.

Such committees will formulate demands based on what workers actually need and will form the organizational basis for workers to share information and link up their struggles across different workplaces and industries, in the US and in other countries.

We urge Nabisco workers to sign up today to learn more about forming rank-and-file committees.



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