

BCTGM union announces tentative agreement with Nabisco, seeking to end strike across five states and impose concessions

James Martin
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Late Tuesday night, the Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union (BCTGM) announced a tentative agreement with Mondelez, parent corporation of Nabisco. Both the company and the union are hoping to steamroll workers and rush the deal through, with the aim of shutting down the five-week strike of more than 1,000 workers across the states of Oregon, Colorado, Virginia, Illinois and Georgia.

BCTGM and Mondelez, the multinational food production company, are conspiring to keep the terms of the deal secret. As with previous contracts agreed by the BCTGM covering Nabisco workers, and the most recent sellout of the Frito-Lay workers strike, the union has kept workers completely in the dark in order to impose yet another sellout on behalf of the company.

One worker at the Chicago Nabisco plant, where at least 345 workers have been on strike, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that a vote had been scheduled for Friday morning at 10 a.m. “It’s all been a secret,” the worker said.

Workers have a right to know what’s in the contract! Nabisco workers should demand at least a week to study the entire agreement, with full income paid to remain on strike. If the BCTGM refuses, Nabisco workers should vote “no” on principle and decisively reject the deal the BCTGM is attempting force through.

The only serious explanation of why BCTGM would not want to provide workers the full terms of the deal and adequate time to carefully review its contents is that they are aiming to secure even further concessions for the company than they did in 2016 and in 2020. Last year, the one-year contract included a deal to bring in temp workers without benefits and kept workers on the job working in sweatshop conditions while exposing them to COVID-19.

There is an urgent need for workers to take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands. To do so, rank-and-file committees should be organized independent of the BCTGM. Such committees would have as their immediate

tasks formulating demands based on what workers actually need, not what the BCTGM and Mondelez claim is affordable, and linking up with Dana workers and Deere workers, who are both in a heated contract battle, as well as the mechanics who are currently on strike in Chicago.

The attempt of the BCTGM to ram the deal through is already provoking opposition among Nabisco workers. On Thursday night, Nabisco workers outside the Portland plant said they planned to vote no and urged their coworkers to do the same, according to local news station KOIN.

What little has been said in the media by Mondelez makes clear that it is the contract it wants, and would maintain the brutal conditions of endless overtime. Mondelez spokeswoman Laurie Guzzinat told *Crain’s Chicago Business* that the agreement is “fully recommended” by both the company and the union.

Seeking to present passage as an accomplished fact, she continued, “Our goal and hope is to bring the workers back certainly in an orderly fashion. We’re already working with the union on the time and the process to do so.” In other words, the BCTGM is working behind the scenes with Mondelez to plan a resumption of production before the deal has even been voted on.

In an indication of the company’s increasing anxiety to end the walkout, Mondelez’s private security guards reportedly attacked protesters who tried to block scabbing workers in Portland this week, according to the *Portland Mercury*. Last month, the company sent a cease and desist letter to striking workers in Portland who tried to stop scabs.

The Portland Nabisco workers were the first to go on strike on August 10, and BCTGM was forced subsequently to let other production and distribution facilities join the strike. The union had kept workers on the job without a contract since May. Earlier this year, the BCTGM allowed two plants to close in Georgia and New Jersey.

Mondelez’s last proposal to the union included significant attacks on Nabisco workers and was virtually identical to the

proposals made prior to the strike. The company demanded changes to overtime with an “Alternative Work Schedule,” adopted in the auto industry and hated by workers; a two-tier health care system that increases premiums and copays; and wage increases below inflation that amount to a pay cut.

The previous proposal included hourly wage increases of \$0.60 per year for the duration of a four-year contract, even as inflation of consumer goods is above 5 percent currently. In addition, Mondelez’s proposal to increase its match of workers’ contributions to the 401(k) retirement plan is a slap in the face to workers who have already lost their guaranteed pensions. A \$5,000 sign-on bonus was proposed as well, which would be largely eaten up in taxes, but which is intended as economic blackmail, as workers have been starved by the BCTGM on almost no strike pay.

Over the last decade, the union has imposed numerous concessions on workers and helped the company carry out brutal layoffs in Chicago and elsewhere. Hundreds of workers lost their jobs at the Chicago facility in 2016.

At the same time the union has been promoting a poisonous nationalist campaign to boycott products made in Mexico, in an effort to pit American Nabisco workers against Mexican Nabisco workers who share the same interests and are up against the same corporate exploiters.

While Mondelez has made billions in profits since the pandemic began and kept workers on the job in conditions of industrial slavery, the BCTGM has kept striking workers on just \$105 a week. The union did the same to the Frito-Lay workers who rejected company-union agreements four times before a sellout deal was imposed on them.

“They want us to be there seven days a week, four-hour shifts at the picket line. And only get paid \$105, and not the first week. Chump money,” the Chicago worker said. “What really hurts us is that people live check to check.”

While overseeing dire conditions and miserable wages at food production facilities, BCTGM sits on over \$32 million in assets and \$11 million in income from dues and other sources. The president of the BCTGM, Anthony Shelton, made over \$288,502 last year. Shelton was at the gathering at the White House last week, photographed with President Joe Biden, who is seeking to use the trade union bureaucracy to prevent a rebellion of the working class against the corporations and the profit system.

Mondelez, for its part, made profits of \$3.6 billion in 2020 during the pandemic. In the first half of 2021, the company reported \$2 billion in net earnings and spent \$2.4 billion in stock buybacks and dividends to enrich its shareholders. CEO of Mondelez Dirk Van de Put took home \$17 million in 2020, nearly 550 times the median income of a Mondelez worker making \$31,500, or 970 times the wage of some of the lowest paid workers, who make around \$17,000.

The Chicago Nabisco worker also spoke out against the hyper-exploitation workers face, especially during a pandemic in which a number of workers have gotten sick with COVID-19.

“We know when we start working but we never know when we’re going to finish,” he said, adding that he was concerned about “the [health] insurance mainly, but also the pension that we lost four years ago, which was the main thing Local 300 lost for us. We should have gone on strike four years ago.”

Speaking on the treachery of the union, he also noted, “We all felt like we should have all walked out at the same time. We felt like we were the only people on the road or highway going to work to make the company money. We had to work six days a week, 12 to 16 hours a day. During the pandemic it felt like we were just robots to them, all they wanted was more and more. Til this day, we’re working long hours because the company doesn’t hire.

“Mondelez is a greedy company,” he said. In their eyes, he added, “We cost too much to them.”

In opposition to the pro-corporate terms continuously enforced by the BCTGM, rank-and-file committees at Nabisco would demand what workers actually need, including 25 percent or more across-the-board wage increases, as well as 6 percent cost-of-living raises annually. Fully paid health care must be provided, and the eight-hour day and pensions restored.

All negotiations between the company and the union should also be livestreamed and monitored by trusted rank-and-file workers. These and other demands can only be achieved by workers taking the initiative, organizing against the company-union conspiracy and appealing to the broadest layers of the working class for support.

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



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