

BCTGM union rushes through sellout deal, ending nationwide strike by Nabisco workers

James Martin, Kayla Costa
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On Saturday, the Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union (BCTGM) shut down the strike of over 1,000 Nabisco workers across the country, imposing another concessionary contract.

The five-week strike first broke out in Portland on August 10, and spread to Nabisco plants and distribution facilities in Aurora, Colorado; Richmond, Virginia; Chicago, Illinois; Addison, Illinois; and Norcross, Georgia.

The BCTGM announced that the contract passed “overwhelmingly” after working out a deal last Tuesday with Mondelez, the multinational parent company of Nabisco. While the BCTGM and its supporters in the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and other pseudo-left groups hailed the deal as a victory, neither the union nor the company have released any details of the contract publicly. Nabisco workers were given very little time to study the contract in advance and were forced to vote on the deal late last week.

Details which have emerged of the four-year contract so far point to yet another sellout by the BCTGM. The contract includes a \$0.60-an-hour increase per year, which amounts to between a 2 and 2.5 percent wage increase per year, depending on the hourly wage of the worker. Inflation levels for commodity prices in the US currently exceed 5 percent, making the proposed pay raises an effective pay cut. A \$5000 sign-on bonus was also offered to bribe workers, which does not make up for lost pay during the strike for most workers.

The brutal conditions workers face at Nabisco are a product of decades of attacks on their living standards with the assistance of the BCTGM. The BCTGM oversaw plant closures in New Jersey and Georgia this year as well hundreds of layoffs in Chicago and across the country, along with attacks on pensions. Moreover, the union has allowed the company to force workers to slave for 60 to

80 hours a week in sweatshop conditions during the pandemic.

While Nabisco workers showed immense courage and determination throughout their strike, the BCTGM sought to starve them into submission with a measly \$105 per week in strike pay. The union, however, sits on over \$32 million in assets and \$11 million in income. Many top union executives, such as BCTGM president Anthony Shelton, have salaries in excess of \$200,000.

There is ample reason to treat the claims of an overwhelming “yes” vote with skepticism. Late last week, workers in Portland rejected the contract overwhelmingly. Cameron Taylor, the business representative of BCTGM Local 364, told the *Willamette Week*, “speaking with most of the members here, the general feel was an overwhelming no vote.” Despite enormous opposition to the contract, the vote total in various locals was kept secret before the BCTGM declared the contract passed over the weekend.

Workers in Portland and the Chicago area expressed their disgust at the deal. Rose, a Nabisco worker in Portland whose name has been changed to protect her identity, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “It’s not a good pay schedule as far as I can see.”

“The strike took place because we never wanted the Alternative Work Schedule,” she said. “All we asked was to keep the old contract terms. We have been on strike, at this point, for nothing. To accept the contract as written makes our sacrifice a joke. We didn’t win. The opportunity to advance our strength, as a whole, was wasted. I was just telling my husband that we have no proof that we voted for or against the proposed contract. Not one neutral person oversaw the vote count. It was all union people. I don’t feel confident that the outcome reflects ‘us’ and ‘our’ needs being heard.”

“We met at 9 a.m. We were given a draft of the proposed contract and discussed the proposal for less than

an hour, then we were asked to vote. The slip of paper said ‘accept’ or ‘reject.’ They collected our votes and placed them in a sealed envelope. We were told they wouldn’t be looked at until the other factories had voted and then counted all together. The union said they didn’t want to give the company a heads up on which plant was wavering.”

While the union claims it will not increase health care costs for new hires, the company and the union have already imposed a two-tier health care plan on workers at the Naperville, Illinois facility. The union has facilitated destruction of pensions between 2016 and 2020, when the company has replaced guaranteed pensions with a 401(k) matching plan in which workers have to pay more out of pocket for their own retirement and gamble their futures on the stock market.

A major sticking point for workers on strike was a proposal to implement an Alternative Work Schedule (AWS) system, based on the auto industry, that would eliminate overtime pay after eight hours and create 12-hour shifts. The new contract forces workers on the weekend crew to work 12-hour shifts with only a 10-minute break.

Rose said of the “weekend crew” provision, “On the 12-hour schedule, all crew members would be paid a total of 40 hours, provided they worked all three 12-hour days. Premium pay wouldn’t come into play until the 6th and 7th work day. So, theoretically you would work three 12-hour shifts, an eight-hour shift on the 4th and 5th days, then on the 6th and 7th days, you receive premium pay.”

But she warned, “No one knows what the company’s expectations are with the 12-hour alternative work [schedule]. No evidence or explanation was provided. My speculation is that there will be a Monday through Friday crew, a Friday through Sunday crew and a Saturday through Monday crew. This will likely eliminate most, if not all, overtime.”

Another worker in Addison, Illinois near Chicago spoke out against the conditions in her facility and denounced the deal as well. “I did not like the deal,” she said, “I didn’t like the fact that I was given the contract in the parking lot and I had to make a decision right there. You’re reading it to me. Meantime my thoughts were stuck on something five pages before that. You’re not really thinking of what’s being read to you now and try to remember. It was horrible.”

“Honestly I think it’s just the same deal as before. It’s just reiterated in a different form. It was sold to us. Whether it worked or not, I don’t know. I personally

think our votes should have been counted right there and with our international numbers. They took the votes, sealed them up. After our vote, they didn’t answer any questions. It was a joke.

“Our votes got put in a box and supposedly that box was going to wherever the other votes were and collectively they’re supposed to figure out if the majority ruled for it or against it. They didn’t tell us our vote totals locally.”

The worker in Addison spoke of these brutal conditions imposed by the union and added, “The working conditions at Mondelez in Addison are ridiculous! They force us [to work] 16-hour days back-to-back, sometimes for weeks straight! They won’t hire, they told us we are overstaffed even though we have potential to run two shifts with eight lines. They now run it with barely enough for five lines and force overtime. They pick and choose who has to stay on a daily basis. Management has favorites and they let their favorites get away with a lot. They don’t feel everyone needs to be forklift certified, which means forcing overtime for people that have been there over 10-12 years while people with less seniority get to go home or not even work there.”

The dubious, anti-democratic maneuvers by the BCTGM to shut down the strike demonstrate the need for workers to organize themselves independently, through new organizations not accountable to the well-heeled union bureaucrats. The WSWS urges Nabisco workers to join autoworkers, teachers, Amazon workers and other sections of the working class by forming rank-and-file committees to formulate their own demands, fight against the spread of COVID-19 in their facilities and link up with the struggles of Dana auto parts workers, John Deere workers and mount a broad counteroffensive for the interests of the working class.

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



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