

# 1,400 Kellogg's workers launch strike in the US, joining growing upsurge of workers' struggles

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Over 1,400 workers at food manufacturer Kellogg's launched a strike at four locations across the US after their contract expired at midnight on Tuesday morning. The strike is at all four of the company's cereal factories in the country, which make products such as Special K, Frosted Flakes and Rice Krispies.

The workers are members of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union (BCTGM). The four plants are in Battle Creek, Michigan, where the company's global headquarters are located; Omaha, Nebraska; Lancaster, Pennsylvania; and Memphis, Tennessee.

The Kellogg's workers' demands will be familiar to millions of workers across the country: the reversal of attacks on pay and benefits, as well as an end to a divisive two-tier wage structure and the brutal overtime regime which the company has imposed during the pandemic. Brian Leche, an electrician at the Battle Creek plant, told local news: "Some people at the plant don't have a scheduled day for the entire year. We aren't willing to accept that anymore."

Relentless overtime and efforts to cut labor costs are being imposed at workplaces all around the country and the world, as transnational corporations seek to insulate their profits from the impact of massive disruptions to global supply chains triggered by the pandemic. At Nabisco plants where workers went on strike last month, seven-day workweeks and 16 hours are also the norm. In the auto industry, workers at parts suppliers such as Dana Inc. and critical assembly plants such as Stellantis' Sterling Heights Assembly Plant have been working mandated weekends throughout the entire year.

In spite of the crisis in world production and the ongoing pandemic, corporations such as Kellogg's continue to rake in profits. Kellogg's latest quarterly financial report recorded an increase of 8.26 percent in net income year-on-year, for a total of \$380 million. Its stock has risen nearly 15 percent from its low in March of 2020.

The strike is the latest in a growing wave of opposition among workers in the United States and internationally. There is enormous potential to not only build up support for the Kellogg's strike among workers across the world, but to construct a global movement of the working class against inequality, inhuman working conditions and the sacrificing of workers' lives during the pandemic for private profit.

Tens of thousands of workers across the United States have

already voted to strike or are scheduled to vote on strike action in the coming weeks:

- 60,000 TV and movie production workers;
- 10,100 workers at agricultural machinery giant John Deere;
- 2,000 telecommunications workers at Frontier in California;
  - 24,000 Kaiser Permanente nurses and other health care professionals
- 334 nursing home workers in Connecticut.
- 280 transit workers in Akron, Ohio and 28 in Beaumont, Texas;
- 450 public works employees in Minneapolis;
- 200 dining hall workers at Northwestern University, 1,900 graduate students at Columbia, 400 at Illinois State and 2,000 at Harvard;

Thousands of workers around the country are also already on strike in the US:

- In health care, 2,200 nurses and hospital workers are striking in Buffalo, New York, more than 1,000 healthcare workers at two locations in Northern California, 100 healthcare workers in Eugene, Oregon and 700 nurses in Worcester, Massachusetts, who have been on strike since early March, the longest nurses strike in the state's history. Health care workers are striking against understaffing and lack of resources, endangering both themselves and their patients.

- Two thousand carpenters in Seattle, Washington, are striking, fighting against a contract containing wage increases below the rate of inflation and attacks on pensions, in rebellion against the pro-corporate United Brotherhood of Carpenters union.

- Among manufacturing, mining, and other workers, 450 metalworkers are on strike in West Virginia, 400 Heaven Hill distillery workers are strike in Kentucky, 650 ExxonMobil refinery workers are being locked out in Beaumont, Texas and 1,100 coal miners at Warrior Met have been on strike since April.

Workers have also launched major strikes and protest actions in a number of other countries, including the October 1 school strike in the United Kingdom and a national rail strike in Germany, which was shut down by the union and which lasted through mid-September. In South Africa, the worst-hit by COVID-19 in Africa and among the continent's most industrialized nations, more than

155,000 metalworkers have launched an indefinite strike to demand an 8 percent wage increase.

Within ruling circles, there is growing fear of a “wages push.” Workers are reacting with anger to the pandemic policies of the corporations and capitalist governments and, emboldened by a labor shortage, are pushing forward with their demands for substantial raises. Last week, Goldman Sachs issued a report warning investors that wages for low-wage workers had increased by an “eye-popping” 6 percent this year.

In reality, a 6 percent wage increase would have been considered extremely modest half a century ago in the United States. However, for the past 40 years the corporate oligarchy has enjoyed unprecedented levels of real wage stagnation, facilitated by the complete integration of the pro-capitalist trade unions with management. This set-up has fueled massive levels of speculative activity in financial markets and an explosive growth in the fortunes of the super-rich.

In a worried article last week on persistently high levels of inflation, the *New York Times* noted that the Biden administration and Federal Reserve “are watching closely to make sure that consumers do not come to expect ever-higher prices amid today’s burst in inflation”—in other words, that workers do not come to expect wage increases commensurate with 5 percent annual inflation. American capitalism’s newspaper of record quoted economist Phil Levy, who said, “The real question is, when your boss says, ‘Hey, I’m giving you a 4 percent raise this year,’ are you happy or upset? Once that stuff gets built in, it can be very painful to change.”

Under conditions of a surge forward by the working class, the ruling class is compelled to rely even more heavily on the trade unions to limit and isolate strikes and impose concessionary contracts. Throughout the year, the unions have sought to impose one contract after another with wage increases below the rate of inflation, while leaving the regime of virtually limitless overtime intact. Moreover, they have worked hand in glove with management to keep workers on the job even amidst continuous outbreaks of COVID-19, covering up infections inside workplace where they occur.

At the same time, the unions are struggling to contain a growing rebellion of workers against such pro-company agreements, with massive votes to reject union-endorsed contracts at Volvo Trucks, Warrior Met Coal, Frito-Lay, Dana Inc., and elsewhere this year.

The BCTGM worked ahead of time to try to isolate the Kellogg’s strike by shutting down a strike by Nabisco workers last month, preventing them from linking up with their fellow food production workers. While the union and its supporters in pseudo-left groups such as the Democratic Socialists of America hailed the end of the strike as a “victory,” workers have returned from the picket line to the same levels of mandatory overtime as before. “Back to no more life,” one Nabisco worker told the WSWS. “Two days [off] is not enough when you’re working 30 hours overtime.”

The same role is being played elsewhere by the United Auto Workers union, which is forcing workers at John Deere and Dana to keep working under contract extensions, despite near-unanimous strike authorization votes; the carpenters union in

Seattle, which has kept the majority of the membership on the job and launched a vicious red-baiting campaign against opposition from rank-and-file workers; and the American Federation of Teachers, which has run roughshod over opposition from educators and collaborated with the extreme right to force the reopening of in-person learning.

Particularly sinister is the BCTGM’s promotion of anti-Mexican chauvinism, blaming workers in Mexico for conditions in US plants. “A lot of Americans probably don’t have too much issue with the Nike or Under Armor hats being made elsewhere or even our vehicles, but when they start manufacturing our food down where they are out of the FDA control and OSHA control, I have a huge problem with that,” Daniel Osborne, the local president in Omaha, told the press. The union is also campaigning for a boycott of “made-in-Mexico Nabisco products.”

Kellogg’s is a multinational corporation, with 21 cereal factories in 18 countries outside of the United States, spread across every continent except Antarctica. Moreover, it has long carried out cuts to jobs and wages on a world scale. In 1995, the company fired 140 workers in Australia at the same time it announced over 1,000 job cuts in the United States. In 2014, it closed its plant in London, Ontario, putting 500 workers out of a job. The BCTGM’s promotion of American nationalism allows the company to isolate workers in the United States from their brothers and sisters in other countries, in a decades-long divide-and-conquer strategy.

The way forward for Kellogg’s workers is through the development of the broadest possible unity and collaboration with workers across the world, who share the same interests and the same common enemy. This requires the development of their independent initiative and organizations, outside and against the union, through the formation of rank-and-file strike committees. Such committees, democratically controlled by workers, will enable information to be shared across the plants, circumventing the blackout of the BCTGM. They will also allow Kellogg’s workers to link up with workers at Nabisco and Frito-Lay, in the meatpacking, auto and other industries, and elsewhere, in a common struggle against low pay and intolerable working conditions.



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