

# Kellogg's mobilizes scabs to break strike of 1,400 workers

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Food manufacturer Kellogg's announced Wednesday that it plans to use white collar workers and "third-party resources" as scabs in a strikebreaking maneuver against the 1,400 workers who have launched a strike at its four US cereal plants this week.

The company announced on its "Kellogg's Negotiations" website that they are "implementing contingency plans to mitigate supply disruptions, including using salaried employees and third-party resources [hiring scab labor] to produce food."

Workers on social media expressed outrage at the company's actions. Several pointed to an incident that occurred in 2014 during an illegal lockout of the workforce at the company's Memphis, Tennessee plant in which a scab worker recorded video of himself urinating on a conveyor belt of the puffed rice used to make Rice Krispies Treats.

Other workers noted the inherent safety hazard of bringing in workers unfamiliar with dangerous production equipment. Mark Gregory, a third shift mechanical operator, told a local news reporter, "They can try to run the plant. I know they think it's easy for us to run the plant, but it takes a lot of skill to run the facility. I hope nobody gets hurt. Equipment in there is very dangerous, we spend a lot of time learning how to run the equipment."

Workers launched the strike Tuesday morning, shutting down four plants which account for all production of Kellogg's cereals in the United States: Battle Creek, Michigan (also the location of the company's global headquarters); Omaha, Nebraska; Lancaster, Pennsylvania; and Memphis, Tennessee. Kellogg's is one of the largest producers of cereals and snack foods, with products including Frosted Flakes, Rice Krispies, Pop-Tarts, and Pringles.

Kellogg's workers are fighting against cuts to jobs,

wages and benefits, and the expansion of the hated two-tier structure, which forces new hires to labor for less pay than their co-workers on the same line. The Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union (BCTGM) agreed to the provision that created the second tier, which is currently capped at 30 percent of the workforce. The company is seeking to lift that cap and expand the number of ultra-exploited "casual" workers who receive a poverty wage.

In addition, workers have been forced to work under a brutal overtime regime during the pandemic, during which the company's revenues have soared amid rising demand for snack products. According to its 2020 annual report, the company made \$1.76 billion in profit on \$13.8 billion in sales in 2020. Kellogg's CEO Steve Cahillane received \$11.6 million in total compensation in 2020, a nearly \$2 million increase from his 2018 package of \$9.9 million.

In a widely shared Facebook post, one Kellogg's worker wrote, "Imagine if you started working at a job that proclaimed to have the best benefits. Then come to find out you will never ever see those benefits because you were hired in after a certain time...Then explain to your family that you put in for a day off months in advance for a special occasion only to be denied that day off...Explain to your family that Santa is going to be late cause you just got forced over 10 minutes before the end of your shift to work another 8 hours. Oh, and after you get home you only get 4 hours of sleep because you have to be back to work...This isn't about employees being greedy. This is about equality and quality time with family."

The wife of another worker posted a picture listing the multi-million dollar compensation packages of Kellogg's top executives, commenting, "Kellogg's

thinks it's ok to pay new employees significantly less, and give them less benefits because the men and women who work SEVEN DAYS A WEEK YEAR ROUND cost the company too much money...let's take a look at who is really costing the company too much money."

The BCTGM union, meanwhile, has offered workers no serious strategy for victory. Earlier this year, the BCTGM forced through sellout agreements to shut down strikes of Nabisco and Frito-Lay workers, isolating Kellogg's workers before their strike even began.

A Nabisco worker in Chicago warned Kellogg's workers, "Make sure they count the votes in front of them. Because they didn't count the votes In front of us, we all know that the union just wanted us to go back to work. At the end of the day is all about money. Do you really think that the union wanted to keep paying us? And also ask for more than \$105 [in strike pay] that we got."

After the sellout contract was forced through, he said, "We're all still working about 20 plus hours overtime for nothing."

Another Nabisco worker in Richmond expressed his support for Kellogg's workers and said, "Fight for what you deserve." He added, "Sixteen-hour days is the normal [shift] being forced over [on] us. The company does what it pleases," while the union did nothing to stop the sweatshop conditions.

The BCTGM has been promoting reactionary nationalism to undermine the solidarity of workers at precisely the moment when international unity is most needed. Kellogg's is a multi-national corporation with factories in 18 different countries outside of the United States. Any serious strategy to defeat the company requires the international unity of US workers with their brothers and sisters around the world.

The BCTGM, however, is promoting "America First," anti-Mexican chauvinism, claiming that workers must unite along national lines to prevent the company from relocating operations to Mexico. In a blatantly racist comment to Yahoo Finance, BCTGM Local 3G President Trevor Bidelman claimed, "You're told quite rightly not to drink the water in Mexico. So I don't know why you would want to eat the food that was made from that water."

In fact, Bidelman and the union did nothing when

Kellogg's announced plans in September to cut 212 jobs from its Battle Creek workforce by 2023. According to a local news report at the time, Bidelman claimed he was "blindsided" by the proposed cuts and offered only the hope that the union could provide "input" on the company's decision.

The BCTGM is promoting GoFundMe pages to "crowdfund" resources for striking workers, signaling to workers that they are going to be largely on their own to survive during the strike, even as the union sits on \$32 million in assets and \$11 million in income built from workers' dues money. Both the union and the company fear the outbreak of a genuinely militant and independent struggle by workers, and they are no doubt working behind the scenes to shut the strike down as quickly as possible.

The gravest warning must be made against any illusions in the BCTGM. As at Nabisco, Frito-Lay, and countless other struggles in recent decades, the unions follow a tried-and-true strategy of isolating strikers, starving them out with meager strike pay, and ramming through a company-backed concessions contract when workers have reached the breaking point.

Kellogg's workers hold immense social power, and can win all their demands and more. However, victory will require workers to take the initiative into their own hands. The *World Socialist Web Site* urges Kellogg's workers to immediately build rank-and-file strike committees comprised of the most militant and trusted workers to take the struggle into their own hands.

Such committees will facilitate the free sharing of information among workers at every plant, enabling workers to develop and implement a strategy for victory. They will allow workers to link up their struggles with those in Frito-Lay and Nabisco plants, as well as across other industries and internationally, in a common struggle for wages, benefits, and healthy working conditions.



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