

Kellogg's management ratchets up strikebreaking operation

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Kellogg's management announced Thursday at midnight that the deadline for its second offer had expired and that it would no longer take part in negotiations with the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union (BCTGM), a move which portends a major escalation of the company's strikebreaking efforts. Kellogg's also filed a lawsuit against picketers in Omaha to prevent the disruption of buses carrying into the plant.

Roughly 1,400 workers in four states have been on strike for six weeks to reverse the concessions from the sellout contract in 2015 which created a two-tier wage system and compulsory overtime in addition to attacks on pay, pensions and health care.

Workers have reported that Kellogg's has been sending them letters in the mail, asking them to return to work wearing a scab uniform and to accept the second contract.

Although Kellogg's has said no more negotiations have been scheduled with the union, the BCTGM apparatus is working to push through a contract that is favorable for the company, rather than the workers on strike. Kellogg's workers are being starved on the picket line, only receiving \$105 per week in strike pay which ends after 10 weeks and are being isolated from workers across the United States and Kellogg's international workforce in 21 plants across the world. The BCTGM concluded sellout contracts at Nabisco and Frito-Lay before Kellogg's workers went out on strike in order to reduce the strength of the working class.

The BCTGM has done nothing to counter the scabbing operation. In fact, the Building and Construction Trades Council (BCTC) has ordered one hundred construction workers, electricians and ironworkers to cross picket lines in Omaha. The

BCTGM has not publicized this information among its own members on its Facebook pages and website, but admitted this fact in the corporate press. The union has also promoted "America First" poison with its aggressive campaign against Kellogg's production in Mexico.

The Kellogg's strike is in danger. Workers can fight back, but first they need to break through the straitjacket of the BCTGM and build up an independent rank-and-file strike committee to expand their struggle and link up with workers across the country and the world. Such committees have played a powerful role in mobilizing opposition to sellout contracts in the auto industry at John Deere, Volvo Trucks and auto parts company Dana.

A WSWs reporting team spoke with workers at the Lancaster, Pennsylvania, plant.

A maintenance worker said, "We are fighting the two-tier wage system that affects production workers. The contract was approved in 2015 and changes took effect after January in 2016. It also lowered pay and benefits." The company "doesn't want to pay benefits. Here is the problem: they don't want to staff us properly across all four plants. With the tier system, they [Kellogg's] have a formula with Lancaster's 360 employees to understaff us so they don't have to pay benefits. They put a cap on our pay. Typically, what happens is they roll COLA [cost of living adjustment] into the base rate but the fact of the cap is that we lose that. It is cost savings and it is not that they can't afford it. Kellogg's made over \$500 million in just cereal sales and the CEO's pay is 20 percent higher than last year."

He added, "A Kellogg's manager named Kris put out a video and made false statements. She said the average worker makes \$120,000 a year in income. I did the

math; this would average 56 hours a day and 365 days a week. There were so much negative comments on this video. The company is not going to win the public war. They can't control the narrative especially with social media."

"Transitionals don't have pensions [and in the last contract] they put a cap on retiree workers for health care. When the contract was ratified in 2015, some workers were not eligible for full retiree health care. Now new hire maintenance staff don't have retiree health care, making another tier for the maintenance department. A lot of workers came from Hershey. It was there in 2010 when they cut jobs, and some took jobs here during the last contract. [Hershey Management] threatened us, showing us blueprints of where they were going to build new facilities."

When asked why the two-tier system was enacted: "The union didn't stop it. I'm not sure if I have faith in the International. They seem to be pretty soft in the previous leadership. The international doesn't give us the full info."

The pandemic has also taken a heavy toll on workers in the plant. "People have been out because of COVID. We worked. It was like nothing was going on and we only got two \$500 checks."

A legacy worker said, "Kellogg's is trying to keep the tier system. We have a transitional program for advancement in the last five-year contract. Kellogg's was supposed to have a clear pathway for workers to become legacy workers. But they said No! And the company extended the contract for a year but the union said it was the legality of the contract and we could not do anything about it."

"Some of us were upset that the union didn't bring us back the [second] contract to vote no on it. I have gone to some union meetings and the contract was worse. Kellogg's took away COLA, added more stipulations."

Another worker added, "We did have the opportunity to vote in 2015 and the company used threats and offered a signing bonus and we had to take concessions. If the International blocked it in 2015 we wouldn't have the two-tier system."

A coworker interjected, "Why aren't they bringing it back to us? My biggest question is: how is the company CEO getting a 20 percent raise and they are saying that they are hurting financially. But then they are giving the company CEO a huge raise. They can make us

work 16-hour days. The unions have been weakening, living standards have been going down. There is a lot of corruption."

Another worker said: "In Battle Creek [Michigan, the headquarters], they are forcing eight hours over the regular shift, making it a 16-hour shift. Kellogg's locked out workers in Memphis in 2014 trying to put in the transitional program in the master contract, threatening to close two plants and move outside the country and we had to take concessions." WSWS reporters said that workers need to unite across class lines with workers in Mexico to fight Kellogg's. Workers agreed with this.

When asked about the poverty-level strike pay, she said: "The union didn't want us to talk. They want us to go back to work. We only get 10 weeks of strike pay and we have been out on strike for six weeks. As long as we are out, we should be getting strike pay."



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