

“We need to come together as a class and defend you”

Kellogg’s workers win wide support for defying union sellout and strikebreaking threats

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10 December 2021

Send in your statements of support for the Kellogg’s strike by writing to the World Socialist Web Site.

After 1,400 Kellogg’s workers on strike rejected the contract brought by the Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union (BCTGM), workers across the country in different industries have enthusiastically supported their courageous stand.

Kellogg’s workers at four plants in Omaha, Nebraska; Battle Creek, Michigan; Lancaster, Pennsylvania; and Memphis, Tennessee, have been on strike for two months against the multinational food-processing giant. In a vote earlier this week, they rejected a union-backed contract, which included raises well below the rate of inflation. In particular, workers want to abolish the two-tier system, which pays so-called transitional workers wages and benefits far below those of “legacy” workers.

After this powerful rebuke to both the BGTGM and the company, Kellogg’s announced it was moving ahead with its plans to hire strikebreakers to replace the workers, many of whom have worked decades producing profits for the Battle Creek-based multinational. In one expression of the popular hostility to this strikebreaking, users on Reddit in the US and internationally on Thursday flooded the company with fake applications to disrupt its efforts to hire scabs.

A Kellogg’s worker told the WWSW the union-backed deal “was a trojan horse. They don’t tell you the legacy transition was longer than the five-year contract.” In social media posts before the vote, another worker said, “We never really are told the full scope of what you are voting for until you accept then read the full language then realize you were duped again. How do you think we got ourselves into this mess in the first place? Don’t be rushed. Understand what you are accepting. You will have to live with it for the next few years.”

Andy, a Kellogg’s worker on strike, posted, “It’s shameful I have to even vote on this steaming pile of GARBAGE!” Ken, another worker, agreed, saying, “‘Shameful’ is one of my thoughts as well. Ken Hurley [head of Kellogg’s labor relations] ‘sidebars’ with the BCTGM and this is what we vote on?” Kimberly added of the union’s treachery, “Wonder whose palms got greased!”

Support from autoworkers and John Deere workers

In comments to the WWSW, workers around the country expressed their solidarity with the Kellogg’s workers. An autoworker from Detroit said, “A message to Kellogg workers on strike. Your struggle is our struggle. Workers everywhere are tired of corporate policies forcing workers to work longer for less and less. As a UAW tradesperson, I can first handedly tell you that our international bargaining committee directly manipulated the membership to jam through a pro-corporate contract that removed such vital protections such as overtime pay.

“Ridiculous as it may sound, we have been FORCED to work seven consecutive 12 hour days—while REMOVING OVERTIME PAY protection by letting the company spread the hours over two ‘pay periods.’ A detail that was conveniently omitted from our ‘highlights’ package. Even though it’s against the law—nobody at the Labor Department or NLRB has any intention of standing up for workers either. They have flatly refused to acknowledge any wrongdoing whatsoever.

“We as workers are standing alone against these corporate giants that own our government. The only thing to stop this tyrannical rule over the working class is for workers themselves to organize from the shop floor upward.”

A member of the rank-and-file committee at the Faurecia Gladstone plant in Columbus, Indiana, denounced the strikebreaking at Kellogg’s. “We have been seeing this in strike after strike. The unions are forcing through contracts after the working class turned them down. Kellogg’s workers need to form a rank-and-file committee. All the rank-and-file committees need to step up and talk to their constituents and get behind Kellogg’s and stop this.

“Maybe all the rank-and-file committees all over the world need to have their constituents walk out for a day. They want to threaten us with firing and replacing us. We need to do something to them before they do something to us.

“This is worldwide. We need to arrange a global walkout and see how the capitalists feel about that. We, the working class, have the power. They are few. We are many. And we can get it done. We just need to coordinate and get together and bring the capitalist class to their knees. This is getting out of hand.

“We need to put the rank-and-file committees in charge of making sure that workers are taken care of instead of allowing the unions to be the police force for the companies. Working 12 and 18 hours a day for

seven days a week—that is inhumane! That is slavery, and we abolished slavery a long time ago.”

An autoworker at the Mack Truck plant in Allentown, Pennsylvania, also expressed his support for the striking Kellogg’s workers. “I’m in the Mack Workers Rank-and-File Committee,” he said, “and I wanted to tell you all I’m very proud of the fight you were willing to put up for your fellow workers at Kellogg’s, striking to abolish an unjust tier system, and for the fight you are fighting to make things better for the working class.

“It is you who is fighting this fight, and right now you are alone. BCTGM made no serious effort on your behalf because a serious effort would have reached out to the rest of us in the working class to garner support. The BCTGM union has not done that.

“I have followed your strike through the WWS, and I want everyone I work with to strike with you. I want workers everywhere to recognize that the attacks against you all are attacks against all of us. We have the power to stop Kellogg’s if enough of us stand up and do it. We need to come together as a class and defend you.”

Speaking of the betrayals of the unions, he added, “The UAW has betrayed our coworkers as well earlier this year. They forced us to handle scab cabs when the workers who normally paint them at the New River Valley, Virginia Volvo plant went out on strike. They had ‘union representation’ too and they were betrayed, the betrayal was orchestrated by our UAW union and yours is doing the same to you.

“BCTGM made a disgusting attempt to drive a wedge between you and your Kellogg’s workers in Mexico, instead of uniting you with them to bring more power to your strike. We can stop these companies from taking advantage of us, but it has to be done by us. No trade unions or politicians are going to make any of it happen for us. We need to build rank-and-file committees and start communicating with each other and coordinate our efforts. We can win together.”

A John Deere worker in Waterloo, Iowa, said, “The company is going to throw everything in the book to scare you into something. My advice would be to get along with your coworkers and stand strong. Don’t allow the union to play their mind games with you.”

A veteran Deere worker in Ottumwa, Iowa, added, “I read that some current workers at the lower tier won’t be allowed to move to upper wages for years. It’s ridiculous, and scary when a company cares this little about their employees.” Everywhere, the companies want to have “just peasants and their masters,” he said.

He encouraged the strikers to stick together, adding that they needed support from truckers and workers at Kellogg’s suppliers in order to sustain their struggle.

Support from Nabisco and Frito-Lay workers

Nabisco and Frito-Lay workers, whose strikes earlier this year were sold out by the BCTGM, expressed their support for Kellogg’s workers. One Nabisco worker in Virginia warned of the treachery of the union: “Keep standing for what you feel you deserve.” He cheered the rejection of the sellout agreement, noting, “Same thing we should have done.”

While Nabisco workers were told the sellout contract that they were forced to accept by the union was a “victory,” workers have told the WWS that the contract resulted in no gains. In fact, the Nabisco worker in Virginia said, “It’s the same old grind. We work seven days

a week with 16-hour shifts. It’s the same as before the strike. The company does what they want. It’s been nothing but forms of retaliation since we’ve been back.”

A Frito-Lay worker, sold out by BCTGM earlier this year, applauded the striking workers. “Stay tough and continue the fight. Don’t give up. Know that your brothers and sisters in other industries are aware and they have your back. The two-tier system is in line with keeping workers divided. It’s your right to reject it. It shows concern for yourself and your fellow workers in the future.

“When I listen to Kellogg’s workers speak, I see my own experience at Frito-Lay. Long hours, low pay, unsafe conditions, high speed. I feel for them. It only strengthens my conviction that we all stand together. There’s zero concern for the safety of workers with the COVID-19 pandemic. Masks are not enforced, but actively discouraged by management. Training is limited to the bare minimum. Individuals are expected to perform up to task almost immediately with very little training, which only contributes to unsafe conditions. It’s a revolving door. It’s the kind of work that most people who have worked their entire life are not cut out for six months tops, and that’s the best of circumstances.

“For people with families, children, it’s a serious challenge. The last thing they want is stability for workers with constant turnover. It creates further division between the workers, with trust and conflict created. Of course, the company has it all down to a science. If they can get 90 days out of you, they’ll be happy. I felt exploited to the extreme. When you look around and see your fellow workers, the damage, the mental and physical damage, you’re breaking your body down. And for what? For the wealth of the company and the select few?”

“The anti-Mexican nationalism of the BCTGM should also be rejected out of hand. As a worker, you should ask, what differences do I have with my fellow workers in Mexico? Push past the propaganda of the union and the government. My fellow Kellogg’s workers: ignore Bernie Sanders and the politicians. You have far more in common interests with your Mexican brothers and sisters than differences.

“You have to continue to expand the struggle beyond your workplace. Link up with other rank-and-file committees, not just in your industry, but across the world. You have to realize the power you possess when you work collectively. It’s greater than anything the company and the government can throw at you. It won’t be easy. It will be hard, but it has to happen. We’re entering the third year of a pandemic and we’re facing the specter of a world war and fascism. We don’t have the luxury of kicking the can to the next generation. Build a rank-and-file committee at your plants immediately. Get the word out to all of your coworkers.”

To defend the Kellogg’s workers, join the growing national and international network of rank-and-file committees.



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