

# Threat to fire striking Kellogg's workers prompts nervous statement from Biden administration

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President Biden issued a nervous written statement Friday criticizing the decision by Kellogg's to begin hiring permanent replacements in its bid to smash the more than two-month-long strike by 1,400 cereal workers. The company announced the move after workers resoundingly rejected a concessions contract backed by the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers' (BCTGM) union last weekend.

The short, eight-sentence statement is a clear sign of the nervousness within ruling circles that the move by Kellogg's could trigger a social explosion within the working class. An initial indication of the level of support for the strikers against the move came earlier this week when Reddit users organized a protest online which brought down the servers Kellogg's was using to hire replacements by flooding them with bogus job applications.

The statement was released the same day the government announced that the official US inflation rate had reached a whopping 6.8 percent in November, the highest rate in 40 years. The significant erosion of workers' living standards by inflation, itself a consequence of the economic and social dislocation caused by the refusal of most of the world's governments to contain and end the pandemic, is a primary factor in the tremendous growth of strikes and threatened strikes in recent months, of which the Kellogg's strike itself is part.

However, Biden's letter did not announce any executive order or other actions by the White House to block the move by Kellogg's or to otherwise intervene directly. Instead, he called on the company and the BCTGM to come together to end the dispute: "My unyielding support for unions includes support for collective bargaining, and I will aggressively defend both. I urge employers and unions [to] commit fully to the challenging task of

working out their differences at the bargaining table in a manner that fairly advances both parties' interests."

However, that Biden is not moved to speak out for concern for workers' rights is underscored by the fact that he made no such statement when unions forced through sellout contracts at John Deere, Kaiser or among film production workers in the IATSE union over the past month. In fact, Biden joined United Auto Workers President Ray Curry for a photo-op only the day after the UAW "ratified" the Deere contract by forcing striking workers to vote again on a proposed agreement they had already rejected.

Nor did Biden make an issue of it several months ago when management at St. Vincent's Hospital in Worcester, Massachusetts, also began hiring permanent replacements to break a months-long strike by nurses, or when bourbon maker Heaven Hill threatened to do the same to break a strike by distillery workers. In fact, the tardiness of Biden's letter, coming three days after the announcement at Kellogg's, suggests the administration was waiting to see whether a direct acknowledgment would be necessary.

Biden, a multimillionaire defender of the privileges of the corporate oligarchy, has no principled opposition to the smashing of workers' resistance. In fact, he supports it. But throughout his presidency he has sought to enlist the services of the corrupt, pro-corporate trade unions in suppressing the class struggle. This is why he sent his Labor Secretary Marty Walsh, a former union official himself, to the Kellogg's picket lines in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Biden vastly prefers a settlement involving a concessions contract forced through by the union, similar to what the BCTGM already accomplished at Nabisco and Frito-Lay earlier this year when it shut down strikes with deals that addressed none of the workers' demands. Since

the strike was ended at Nabisco, workers reported to the *World Socialist Web Site* that they are continuing to work 80 hours a week, exactly as before.

The difficulty in Biden's strategy, however, is that anger is growing against these increasingly naked betrayals by the unions, which have failed to stem the tide of workers' opposition. The contract which workers rejected last week at Kellogg's would have included wage increases of only 3 percent, less than half of the rate of inflation, and eliminated restrictions on the number of lower paid second-tier "transitional" workers the company could hire. Workers denounced the contract, which was dishonestly presented to them as providing a "pathway" to the top tier for transitionals, as a "Trojan horse."

Frustration continues to grow with the BCTGM among Kellogg's workers. "We're tired of being in the dark 'hence the fact why we're so divided,'" one worker said. Referring to the fact that some strikers have buckled under the pressure in recent days and crossed the picket line, he added, "You're not losing people out of fear, you're losing because they have half of the information and they're ready to go back to work."

A Kellogg's worker from Battle Creek told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "With \$105 a week [in strike pay], no unemployment, workers are forced to work elsewhere and or take money from their savings or 401k. You would think our international [BCTGM] would be able to contribute more. I also think it's BS that we worked through the entire pandemic while most of America collected unemployment, and now we need it and do not qualify for it."

### Support continues for striking Kellogg's workers

Workers across the United States are continuing to send in statements of support for the Kellogg's strike to the *World Socialist Web Site*. Tonya Osborne, a Southwest Airlines flight attendant who was recently interviewed by the WSWS about the impact of uniforms containing toxic chemicals, spoke against the strikebreaking measures by Kellogg's. "I believe more workers throughout all industries, whether it is Kellogg's, John Deere, the airlines, etc., should not have to endure threats of any kind. They should not have to fight or strike for what is owed to them for their hard work and commitment to the

corporate giant."

As to the union, she added, "Their union dues are deducted monthly from their paychecks. Ours is \$50 a month ... and for WHAT, so they can blow smoke and throw us under the bus? Why would they throw out a tentative agreement and be forced to vote the same day? Bullying by your own union which you pay for? These threats to hire [second-tier] employees making lesser money and no benefits, to put that money in the corporate giant's pockets is a slap in the face."

A Deere worker in Des Moines, Iowa, said, "To all of my working brothers and sisters currently striking against Kellogg's: Greetings from Iowa, my admiration, support, prayers, and love go to all of you. The fact that you were not willing to accept the sellout agreement despite the union push speaks volumes about your courage and determination.

"While I cannot speak about your situation with Kellogg's, I can tell you what happened to us who work at John Deere. The company threatened us with their 'Last, Best and Final Offer,' and the union leadership at the local and international level did the same. They told us numerous times that if we don't accept their offer, they will permanently replace us.

"The majority of the workers were not in favor of the contract, but they succumbed to the threats of losing their jobs and voted yes under very shady circumstances. ... The hope was to make history for all working men and women in the USA and the rest of the world. Now the eyes of working men and women throughout the USA are directed only at you in the hope that you will win what you rightfully deserve and set the standard for the rest of us so we can learn from your struggle. So be safe, be strong, stay united, and stay informed because that is your biggest strength right now."



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