

Vote NO on the tentative agreement at Kellogg's! Build rank-and-file committees to expand the strike!

Tom Hall

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Kellogg's abruptly announced a "new" tentative agreement with the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers' International (BCTGM) Thursday night which is virtually identical to the one which striking workers rejected overwhelmingly two weeks ago.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls for the broadest possible rejection of this sellout contract during Sunday's vote, sending the deal into the garbage can where it belongs.

Instead, workers must take the struggle out of the hands of the corrupt union apparatus by forming a rank-and-file strike committee to expand their more than two-month-long strike and appeal for the broadest possible support from workers around the country and Kellogg's workers internationally. Kellogg's workers have come too far to give up now, and a victory in this critical battle would embolden and encourage workers everywhere.

By the admission of the BCTGM itself, the deal contains no movement on the most important issue for workers, namely, the company's attempt to remove all limits on the use of lower paid, second-tier "transitional" workers.

The contract would allow the company to expand substandard wages and drive conditions back generations, while stringing transitional workers along on a bogus "pathway" to full pay which would take six years or more, even longer than the five-year deal itself. Legacy workers would receive just one \$1.10 general wage increase, while workers overall would receive limited cost-of-living adjustments (COLA), which would be capped at \$3 for the length of the contract, under conditions in which inflation is soaring.

Such is the arrogance of Kellogg's management that it did not even bother to produce a substantially new "highlights package" in support of the deal. Instead, they moved a few words around from the last highlights in order to give the impression that the deal is different.

Kellogg's has more than enough money to pay for a high standard of living for all workers. Its profits have surged during the pandemic, which CEO Steve Cahillane rosily called a "sampling event like none other" which increased "the household penetration" of the company's brands to \$1.25

billion last year. The company has been profitable for almost its entire 110-year existence, especially in recent decades on the backs of a super-exploited international workforce, which has experienced decades of job cuts and stagnating wages.

And yet Kellogg's is throwing down the gauntlet, threatening to hire permanent replacements if workers do not accept significant concessions. Management is emboldened because they are relying on the BCTGM union to ram this rotten deal through against workers' opposition.

That the BCTGM is even bringing this contract to a vote—despite it being almost entirely the same as what workers already rejected—shows that the union is working hand in glove with the company. Their concern is only that concessions be enforced "jointly" with themselves in order to maintain the bloated salaries of the union apparatus.

The contempt with which the union regards Kellogg's workers was indicated earlier this week when it announced an insulting \$200 Christmas "gift" on top of the starvation \$105 a week in strike pay which it has forced strikers to subsist on. This is mere pocket change for the union: With 1,400 workers on strike at \$200 per person, this amounts to less than the \$288,000 annual salary of President Anthony Shelton. It will be paid for out of a small fraction of the \$72 million in assets controlled between the national headquarters and the locals.

How the BCTGM intends to ram through the contract

To ram through the contract, the BCTGM is using what should be termed the "John Deere Maneuver," after the virtually identical methods employed by the United Auto Workers to shut down a strike at the agricultural equipment maker this fall:

First, the BCTGM is isolating workers on the picket line as much as possible, while allowing the company to issue threats with impunity in an attempt to soften workers up. Instead of appealing for support from the working class, the union is

focusing its attention on fruitless appeals to Democratic Party politicians, who have flocked to the picket lines to issue insincere statements of support aimed at bolstering the credibility of the union bureaucracy.

Significantly, the union did not even issue a single public comment in response to Kellogg's threats to fire workers en masse until the Biden administration issued a worried statement late last week, and then only acknowledged the threats in order to issue fawning praise and thanks to the millionaire capitalist politician for his "support." If the BCGTM is silent over the strikebreaking threat, it is because they fundamentally support it and want to see the walkout shut down just as much as management.

The union is now staging a photo op on Friday outside the plant at Battle Creek, Michigan, with Senator Bernie Sanders where, if the contract is referred to at all, it will be to absurdly declare it a "victory."

Second, the union is rushing to force through a vote, as it did two weeks ago, keeping workers in the dark through an intense campaign of censorship. Around the country, BCTGM locals are "archiving" Facebook groups which hundreds of workers rely on to discuss the strike and share information, pulling the plug on any forum which threatens to get out of the union's control. The aim of this is to quarantine workers opposed to the contract from their coworkers before this opposition spreads.

Third, the union is attempting to wear out workers by making them vote over and over on virtually the same contract until they either vote "correctly" or the vote is close enough for the union to "massage" the numbers. Significantly, even though balloting takes place Sunday, the results will not be announced until Tuesday. There is no reason for this delay other than to give the union officials who control the balloting such room for maneuver.

The way forward for the Kellogg's strike

New organizations need to be built to take the struggle out of the hands of the union bureaucracy. This means the formation of a rank-and-file strike committee, composed of workers themselves and excluding union officials, to democratically organize and direct the fight for workers' own demands. The *World Socialist Web Site* proposes that these demands include:

- A three-year contract, with 10 percent wage increases plus COLA each year;
- The immediate transfer of all transitionals to the top tier;
 - The restoration of the eight-hour day and five-day workweek and the abolition of the regime of forced overtime;
 - Workers' control over COVID-19 safety measures, including the right to shut down facilities in the event of an outbreak, with full compensation for the workforce during the

shutdown.

To fight for this, the Kellogg's strike needs adequate resources. Already, the threat of financial destitution has led some workers to cross the picket line. To rectify this, the rank-and-file committee should fight for **the immediate expansion of strike pay to \$750 per week**. The bloated six-figure salaries of union executives should be suspended and non-essential personnel furloughed until the conclusion of the strike. The \$72 million in assets the union holds is money that belongs to the workers, paid for out of their dues and not a piggy bank for the bureaucracy.

Kellogg's and the BCTGM want striking workers to believe that they are isolated and cannot win their demands. They lie. While the strike faces significant challenges, workers are in a favorable position to win their demands, demonstrated by the massive outrage provoked by the threat to hire permanent scabs. Driven by infections and the impossible economic conditions created by the incompetent and criminal response to the coronavirus pandemic, workers across the world are entering into struggle.

There is an increasingly open rebellion by workers against the pro-corporate trade unions, including in strikes at John Deere and Volvo and the widespread opposition to sellout contracts at auto parts maker Dana, hospital giant Kaiser Permanente, Frito-Lay and the film production industry. Many workers have responded by forming rank-and-file committees at their workplaces. The fact that Biden felt compelled to respond to the strikebreaking threats at Kellogg's shows that the capitalist class is terrified that this could happen here as well.

The Kellogg's strikers have allies in the working class around the world. There are 21 other Kellogg's plants in the United States and 27 internationally, spread across Mexico and Latin America to Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia. All of these workers have faced the same whipsawing by the company supported by the unions, in a bid to force workers to accept cuts in the name of global "competitiveness."

Reinforcements must be activated and mobilized through the development of a broad network of rank-and-file defense committees. But the BCTGM opposes the international unity of Kellogg's workers and instead is promoting an anti-Mexican campaign, which only divides the strike from its most powerful untapped reservoir of support, the international working class.

The strike can and must be won, but the situation depends on workers seizing the initiative. The *World Socialist Web Site* stands ready to provide assistance. Contact us by filling out the form below:



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