

Jon Donaire bakery workers in California continue strike against speed up, mandatory overtime and low wages

Hong Jian**17 December 2021**

One hundred and seventy five bakery workers have been on strike at the Jon Donaire bakery outside of Los Angeles since November 3. The workers, who are in the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers' International Union (BCTGM), walked out over a host of issues including mandatory overtime, long hours, relentless speedup, poor pay, lack of breaks and a punitive point system for attendance.

The strike by workers at Jon Donaire is a part of the massive growth in strikes and workers struggles that has erupted over the course of 2021. It is taking place at the same time as a nationwide strike by 1,400 Kellogg's cereal workers, who are also in the BCTGM. On Thursday, the union and Kellogg's announced a new concessions contract, virtually identical to the one which workers rejected two weeks ago.

Workers at Jon Donaire make between \$16 and \$18 an hour and generally work between 12 and 16 hours a day making cakes which are sold at Safeway, Walmart and other supermarkets. They are supposed to be entitled to two breaks, increasing to three if they work more than 12 hours. Yet according to workers, they rarely are able to take advantage of this, and face retaliation if they bring their lack of break time to someone's attention. As for the pace of work, workers are now expected to make 13 cakes a minute, when previously the number was eight.

One worker said in a video posted on YouTube that, "These conveyors have gone up excruciatingly fast." Another said, "Fingers hurting, with crampy fingers, arthritis and back pain, they didn't care! They just said, 'No, we've got to keep the machine going.'"

Jon Donaire was founded in 1979 at Sante Fe Springs, but was later bought out by New York-based

Rich Products Corporation. Rich's is a transnational corporation that is ranked 116th on Forbes Magazine's list of America's largest private companies.

The firm employs over 11,000 people worldwide with factories in India, China, Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, Mexico, Brazil, Canada, Australia, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States. The corporation sells over 2,000 different products in over 112 different countries and has over \$4 billion in sales.

The current contract offer from John Donaire management contains an insulting wage increase of only \$.50 per hour, amounting to a significant pay cut when factoring in inflation, which is currently running at 6.8 percent nationally. The BCTGM is only demanding a one dollar an hour raise, which still comes out to slightly less than the rate of inflation.

Workers at Jon Donaire have gone to social media to demand far more than the crumbs the union and the company are offering them. In addition to higher wage increases, the workers are demanding increased hiring and an end to speed up. They also want an end to the punitive points system, where they are given a point for each absence and a half point for each tardy or early departure; they are only allowed seven points a year. Workers are even given a point for the first day off of sick time, even if they have a doctor's note.

Workers are also demanding an end to mandatory overtime. One Jon Donaire worker described how overtime is frequently foisted on them at the end of shifts. "My shift is from 5 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. At 1:25, they come up and say, 'Oh, Cristina, you need to stay.' And they'll let me know at 1:25, when I'm ready, like, to leave to go get my son from school."

The workers at Jon Donaire have received widespread

support from the local community and from across the country. A Gofundme campaign launched to supplement the BCTGM's miserly \$105 per week in strike pay has already reached \$20,480 out of a goal set for \$30,000, with contributions coming from workers in other industries and other states. One worker who contributed stated, "Solidarity with workers under-compensated, under-appreciated, and exploited for high margins."

The experience of the strikes carried out this year by other BCTGM members at Frito-Lay, Nabisco and Kellogg's demonstrates that the union will not fight for workers' demands but instead seek to enforce concessions, with the issue of working hours in particular left entirely unresolved. Instead of appealing for active support from workers across the country and the world, the union is instead directing workers' attention towards fruitless appeals to Democratic party politicians such as Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders.

Moreover, while the union has highlighted the fact that much of the John Donaire workforce is Latin American, it is at the same engaged in a filthy anti-Mexican campaign at Kellogg's, calling on the company to stop producing cereal in Mexico. In one particularly racist comment, Local 3G President Trevor Bidelman told Yahoo Finance, "You're told quite regularly 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, Kellogg's has had production facilities in Mexico since the early 1950s.



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