

Striking Kellogg's workers oppose tentative agreement, call for broadening the strike

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Opposition remains high among striking Kellogg's workers to a tentative agreement which would end a nearly three-month-long strike by 1,400 Kellogg's workers at four US cereal plants. Balloting began Sunday for the new tentative agreement, which is virtually identical to the one workers rejected two weeks ago. Workers are demanding an end to the hated two-tier wage structure, substantial wage increases and an end to brutal levels of overtime.

Kellogg's management, which threatened to fire workers en masse after the last agreement was overwhelmingly rejected, is relying upon the services of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers' International Union to hammer through the contract over workers' opposition. This was made clear by a leaked management email published last Friday by the pseudo-left More Perfect Union, which read, "In short, overall bucket of money (cost) stays the same. Just shifts money from one bucket to another." It adds with malicious satisfaction, "No gain overall for them [Kellogg's workers] with 3 more weeks of strike and no income. No ratification bonus. We are confident this will pass [because] most of the union's negotiating committee is for this and plans to recommend it."

"It's a no here [in Battle Creek, Michigan], probably 95 percent no," a legacy worker told the *World Socialist Web Site* Sunday afternoon. "It's like the agreement we voted down unanimously two weeks ago with a couple words around." She pointed in particular to the fact that the current TA also eliminates the cap on how many second-tier "transitional" workers the company can employ.

"That's Kellogg's for you. I love my job, I could not believe it when I got a job here seven years ago. It took me five times to get just an interview. I was proud to tell people I worked for Kellogg's. I don't feel that

way anymore. I am a legacy worker now. I was a casual worker when I came in. We were temps but paid by Kellogg's. What they call 'transitionals,' they still get paid through Kellogg's. It's not like you work less hours. They work the same amount of time as us, same hours, same everything, minus the benefits. They started the transitional status in the 2015 contract. Kellogg's threatened to shut the Memphis plant down if we didn't accept the contract. We didn't want Memphis workers to lose their jobs.

"It was held over our heads to vote in the 2015 contract. There are some transitionals already waiting for six years waiting to be brought onto full pay. Like all of us, they have been working 16-hour days four times a week."

Kellogg's announced that further cuts to the workforce would continue at plants, particularly at Battle Creek where there are less than 300 BCTGM members remaining. "This is the second time in seven years my job has been threatened. It's not just about wages, it's about people's rights and threatening people's jobs if they don't do what Kellogg's wants them to do.

"When they turned casual workers into transitionals, they got insurance, but it came out of [workers'] pockets. They don't get the same pay or holidays. It used to be transitionals were getting 70 percent of top pay for one year with insurance and benefits. After 5 years you were hired in." With the current contract, Kellogg's and the BCTGM have offered a longer route to full time pay, with only 3 percent of the plant's total workforce "graduating" each year.

Rejecting the anti-Mexican demagoguery promoted at a rally Friday in downtown Battle Creek by the BCTGM and Vermont senator Bernie Sanders, she explained, "Down there in Mexico if they're doing the same job

we're doing. Why are they not making more money? They should be making more money! Kellogg's threatens those workers like they do here, to take jobs away to make them fall in line. It's all corporations that do this."

Responding to Sanders' appearance she said, "we need our jobs too, but we don't blame Mexican workers. Kellogg's is looking to exploit them down there. They could be paid way more. They bid between Mexican and American workers on who will take less. Look at Flint. [Our] government has done nothing for these people, just like those in Mexico. Here the unions take things away in the contract and give you no warning.

"Two union presidents for the prior TA said they were neutral. Now they're recommending it to workers. Then they shut down the Facebook pages so we couldn't talk to each other. It worries us workers that some bargaining committee officials are going to retire and are not worried about the rest of the workforce. It's like an arsonist leaving the scene of the crime. Keep throwing the same contract out and dragging it out."

Another legacy worker stated, "We have no idea and no information on this TA. We don't even know what other workers at other plants are thinking. At this local it'll be over 90 percent no. Kellogg's has continued to threaten to [fire] workers but they've done that for years. The language of the TA isn't good, it seems like they can hire as many as they want. With these wages, I've seen Hobby Lobby offering \$18 an hour, or you can work nine shifts a week here and never see your family."

A retired worker participating and supporting the strike stated, "In the 30 years I worked here, my salary got a little better. Halfway through, they took COLA and made workers pay for their insurance. My supervisor was paying \$500 per month for insurance, company called it a new work system for the company and union to work together. They screwed the salary workers so we didn't trust anything."



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