

# Voting closes on concessions contract at Kellogg's, while union uses divide-and-conquer tactics to break strike

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Voting ended Monday night among 1,400 striking Kellogg's workers on a concessions tentative agreement which would end a nearly three-month strike at four cereal plants. The results of the vote are expected to be announced Tuesday.

While the main demand of workers is an end to the hated two-tier wage structure, under which "transitional" employees make substantially less than "legacy" workers, the new deal brokered by the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers' International (BCTGM) not only continues but expands it, eliminating caps on the number of "transitionals" the company can hire at each plant. The deal also contains paltry three percent wage increases.

In fact, the deal is virtually identical to a tentative agreement (TA) which workers voted down by an overwhelming margin three weeks ago. In response, Kellogg's threatened to retaliate by firing workers en masse and replacing them, triggering outrage from workers and supporters of the strike across the world, and prompting a nervous intervention by the Biden administration and the Democratic Party, clearly eager to avoid provoking a too direct and open confrontation with the working class.

A leaked internal Kellogg's management email lays out the company's reliance on the union to push through the deal. "We are confident this will pass," the email states, because "most of the union's negotiating committee is for this and plans to recommend it." It concluded by urging managers to maintain a careful silence about the deal in public, in order to allow the union space to pass the deal.

The endorsement from the bargaining committee is a shift from the previous TA, where, in an attempt to

save face, the committee remained officially neutral despite bringing the deal to a vote. Workers tell the *World Socialist Web Site* that several bargaining committee members have flipped and are now pushing for the deal's approval.

The union is attempting to ram the deal through with a campaign of internet censorship, archiving several Facebook groups used by over a thousand workers in order to prevent them from making critical posts or freely discuss the contract with their coworkers.

"Yep, we need to get that (email) everywhere, especially the other 3 plants," one legacy worker said. "It wasn't seen because the other private union sites pretty much blocked us all. So [the] only message they saw was what the company said and the bullsh\*t sellout leadership showed them."

In a statement last week, the *World Socialist Web Site* described the methods used by the BCTGM to break the strike as the "John Deere Maneuver" after the almost identical methods used by the United Auto Workers union to end a month-long strike at the agricultural equipment manufacturer with a rotten deal which workers had already voted to reject.

This three-part maneuver involves: 1) the isolation of workers on the picket line and starving them out on \$105 in strike pay (supplemented with an insulting \$200 "gift" announced last week by the union); 2) rushing through the vote while seeking to block all channels of communication for workers to discuss the contract; and 3) wearing workers down by making them vote on virtually the same deal again and again, under opaque voting procedures leaving the bureaucracy ample room to stuff the ballot box if needed.

Another critical element of the UAW's strategy that

the BCTGM is also copying is dividing workers up by plant, seeking to isolate the more militant plants from the less militant. The Kellogg's plant in Battle Creek, which is under threat of further job cuts, is the main center of opposition to the deal, and even now the sentiment among workers there is such that the local union officials have felt unable to openly campaign in favor.

Instead, they are attempting to convince Battle Creek workers that other plants are likely to cave, rendering their opposition moot. Workers at Battle Creek have reported to the WSWS that they have been told as much repeatedly by local officials. Whether or not it is true that opposition is significantly less entrenched at the Memphis, Omaha and Lancaster plants, and this is difficult to confirm given that their respective Facebook pages have been shut down, the purpose of claiming this is to discourage opposition and attempt to erode the "no" margin at Battle Creek to the point where a narrow vote in favor at the other plants would be sufficient to pass the contract. This is how the deal at John Deere was ultimately rammed through.

Similar methods were also used by the UAW and the United Steelworkers union during a contract vote at auto parts maker Dana Inc. this August. Workers were told repeatedly by union officials that their "no" votes would be canceled out by "yes" votes at other plants. But instead, these "other plants" themselves turned out to be massive centers of opposition, and one plant in Toledo, Ohio even voted down the contract unanimously.

Regardless of whether or not the contract is declared ratified or not on Tuesday, the entire process itself is a sham from start to finish. The leaked management email itself should be enough to prove that any contract negotiated under such conditions should be considered null and void.

In the event that the contract passes, management and the BCTGM have set a return-to-work date for next Monday, December 27. Given the extremely rapid rise in COVID cases throughout the Northeast and Midwest, driven by the spread of the hyper-infectious Omicron variant, this would mean that they would be sending workers into virtual death traps, where hundreds could potentially become infected.

In Calhoun County, where Battle Creek is located, cases have been steadily rising since the summer, and

the seven-day moving average reached 162 earlier this month. In Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, the seven-day average has risen to 338; in Douglas County, Nebraska, 258 and in Shelby County, Tennessee, where the Memphis plant is located, cases are beginning to rise again.

Throughout the pandemic, at least 13,776 food processing workers in the United States have been infected and 61 have died, according to the Food and Environment Reporting Network.

Regardless of the end result of the contract vote, a "yes" vote would only mean the struggle continues in a new form. The entire experience shows that workers need new organizations. Workers must take the struggle out of the hands of the BCTGM by forming rank-and-file strike committees and connect not only on a plant-by-plant basis but with their coworkers internationally.



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