

Striking Jon Donaire bakery workers overwhelmingly reject contract backed by BCTGM union

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Striking bakery workers at a Jon Donaire dessert plant in Santa Fe Springs, California overwhelmingly rejected a tentative agreement between management and the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers' International Union (BCTGM) on Friday. The singular highlight of the insulting offer was a three percent raise of \$.50 an hour.

The deal included a major giveback on healthcare. Miguel Perez, the organizer of the official gofundme page for Jon Donaire workers, said that “we rejected the latest offer by the company by a majority vote, saying the offer was not acceptable, and was actually a take away [in] which workers were being asked to pay like \$700 into the health care and a measly 50 cent increase. And so we have no choice but to continue the strike.”

The vote at Jon Donaire came just days before Kellogg's workers were forced to vote yet again on a reworded contract that was in all respects the same as the one that was rejected three weeks ago. That rejection sparked the company to threaten to bring in scabs as replacement workers, prompting the Biden administration to nervously intervene for fear that the struggle would escalate out of the control of the BCTGM.

The contract was declared “ratified” by the union Tuesday morning after an opaque balloting procedure in which the union engaged in censorship on social media. A leaked email from Kellogg's management made clear that the company relied upon the critical assistance of the union to pass the contract. “We are confident this will pass, most of the union's negotiating committee is for this and plans to recommend it,” the email states.

Bakery workers at Jon Donaire have been on strike for 50 days because they are subject to relentless speedups on the line. They are required to make between 13 and over 30 cakes a minute, work mandatory overtimes which are announced shortly before or right at the end of a shift, labor under a punitive points-based attendance system which discourages workers from using their sick leave, and endure the ignoring by management of contractually mandated breaks.

None of these issues were addressed in the tentative agreement brought forward by the BCTGM, and the union itself is not pressing for any of these demands, despite workers raising them on the picket line time and again. The BCTGM's singular demand, according to the union's webpage, is a raise of one dollar an hour, which is not even enough to keep pace with inflation, currently at 6.8 percent. This would still leave workers with poverty wages in a city like Los Angeles, where an income under \$50,000 a year means an individual is rent distressed.

In contrast to the pay of bakery workers at Jon Donaire, well over a dozen top BCTGM officials make salaries of more than \$100,000 per year, and current president Anthony Shelton made \$288,000 last year, according to Department of Labor filings.

Shelton has spent almost his entire life as a highly paid functionary. He was a Trustee on Local 25's Executive Board, where his father served as local president until 1992, when he was appointed to the lucrative position of Southern Region International Representative. He remained at that post for 23 years until ascending to the position of International Vice President of the Southern Region on the BCTGM

General Executive Board. He then moved on to the position of Secretary Treasurer for a short period before taking over the presidency with the death of former president David Durkee.

The well-heeled functionaries at the BCTGM are a world apart from the workers they purportedly represent, with compensation packages that are up to eight times what a bakery worker receives.

But the workers at Jon Donaire have received significant public support for their struggle, and the gofundme page in support of workers has received \$10,000 in donations in just the last week. However, workers must draw the necessary conclusions from the experience at Kellogg's, which shows that the union will seek to isolate and betray their strike. To fight the corporations, bakery workers must take the initiative out of the hands of the BCTGM and form democratically controlled rank-and-file committees to carry the struggle forward.



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