

# Nestlé Purina workers in Pennsylvania on strike

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On March 2, 459 workers at a Nestlé Purina plant in South Whitehall Township, Pennsylvania went on strike at the pet food company after voting to authorize a strike over wages and benefits.

The workers are members of International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 773 and, according to the group's Facebook page, voted by an "overwhelming majority" to strike. Workers want significant improvements in wages, pensions and overwork.

The Nestlé Purina plant produces food for dogs and cats including ALPO, Beneful, Beyond, Dog Chow, Friskies, Purina One and Purina Pro Plan brands.

Workers both at the picket lines and on social media have given voice to their concerns as well as insight into the conditions at the plant. "[We're fighting] to get better, fairer wages and health care, and pension and health care and pension and all that stuff," said Ian Heiser, a striking worker at the plant told local 69 News.

A former employee on Facebook explained, "I worked at that plant for a couple months" before being laid off. Work at the plant involved "way too much [overtime]... everything was focused on the dollar per hour wages...[the] employee portion of medical benefits were hellishly expensive. Short term disability was pitiful and surprisingly your benefits ended as of midnight the day you left."

Another former employee corroborated this, saying "I worked there for 15 years. Eventually the [overtime] and toxicity got the best of me." A current employee added, "I have been there a year and 6 months [and it] feels like 20 years."

In response to the strike authorization vote, the company issued a statement saying that "Nestlé Purina remains ready and willing to continue bargaining in

good faith to resolve this dispute." However, this claim was disputed by workers on social media, who replied to these boilerplate comments by noting the company deliberately ignored opportunities to negotiate with the local bargaining team, making the strike inevitable.

According to ZipRecruiter, the average pay rate of a Nestlé Purina hire is between \$13-\$21 an hour. That is, the average pay of workers involved in the packaging and processing of animal food make less an hour than the average fast food worker.

Nestlé Purina is the most profitable pet food corporation in the world. Its revenue in the United States in 2023 totaled \$21.4 billion. It was acquired by Swiss multinational Nestlé in 2001 for a cost of \$10.3 billion, making it the largest US-based pet food company. In the 2020s, the corporation has undergone consecutive double-digit profit growth year-after-year.

In its official statement, Nestlé Purina stated that they have "activated a contingency plan that will allow us to maintain basic operations with minimal disruption to our product supply."

Teamsters President Sean O'Brien has applauded the Trump administration's assault on federal workers and immigrants and the union bureaucracy is opposed to waging the necessary fight to defend its own members. As of 2021, the IBT Local 773 has approximately 7,500 members. Yet aside from the Purina workers, none have been mobilized in sympathy strike actions to help their fellow members win this struggle. This says nothing about appealing to the roughly 8,000 Purina workers in the United States and the thousands more worldwide.

Instead, the Teamsters apparatus will inevitably try to isolate the strike, wear down the resistance of the rank and file and ram through yet another concessionary contract. Last month, Teamsters called off a potential

strike of 18,000 Costco workers and have tried to ram through a sellout contract, which includes minimal pay raises that don't keep up with rising living costs.

It stood idly by as 1,400 Teamster members working for the car hauling company Jack Cooper were abruptly fired in January after Ford announced it would terminate their 40-year contract without giving a reason.

This struggle can and must be won. But everything depends on the independent initiative of the striking workers themselves. A rank-and-file strike committee, consisting of the most class conscious and militant workers, should be formed to formulate demands that meet workers needs, and countermand any action by the union bureaucracy to violate the will and needs of the membership.

At the same time, this committee should fight to broaden the strike by uniting with Mack Trucks and other workers across the Lehigh Valley, and millions of federal workers, educators, health care workers and manufacturing workers, in the US and internationally, to defend the democratic and social rights of the working class. Such a committee, which will be affiliated with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), should make a special appeal for united action with Nestlé workers around the world.

To join the fight for rank-and-file power, fill out the form below.



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