

Work slows at Portland plant as Nabisco shifts production to Mexico

Nabisco workers in Portland haven't had their jobs outsourced to Mexico, but Mexican imports are beginning to pinch their paychecks anyway.

The Bakery Confectionery Tobacco and Grain Millers (BCTGM) union has been waging a national boycott campaign against Mexican-made Nabisco products ever since parent company Mondelez closed several Chicago baked good production lines in early 2016 and reopened them in Salinas, Mexico.

Now, work is slowing down at the Portland bakery that produces Oreos and Chips Ahoy, while Mexican-made versions of those cookies fill Portland store shelves.

Local 364 Business Representative Cameron Taylor said the Portland bakery shut down entirely the week after Memorial Day. Because unemployment insurance doesn't kick in until the second week, the shut-down meant a week's lost wages for the plant's 200 union members. Then the last week of June, the company ran the plant at half capacity, with just three of its six ovens going. The first week of July, just two ovens were in production. Nabisco asked for volunteers to take a second week of unpaid time off, and some of the remaining production workers were reassigned to sanitation duty.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) mentioned the Portland slowdown in a June 15 letter to Mondelez CEO Irene Rosenfeld.

"While my constituents are now back at work, I know they fear future disruptions," Wyden wrote. Wyden asked Rosenfeld



BCTGM Local 364 President Jason Lind and his coworkers at the Portland Nabisco bakery suffered a week-long layoff in June — even as products made by their employer's Mexican bakeries filled Portland grocery shelves.

to share with him the company's long-term vision for Oregon production.

Wyden's letter came after a similar letter from Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) that was signed by 16 other Democratic U.S. senators, including Sen. Jeff Merkley of Oregon.

The letter expressed "deep concern" over Mondelez's ongoing corporate practice of shifting production from the

company's U.S. bakeries to its bakeries in Mexico.

"Mondelez' actions ... put short-term profits ahead of investing in America and the American worker," the senators wrote. "It is long past time for all corporations, including Mondelez, to end offshoring practices that foster an economic race to the bottom and put short-term profits ahead of American workers and their families."

OPEN FORUM

To The Editor:

Two of our largest issues weakening our country today are issues with healthcare and the loss of manufacturing to foreign countries.

It is not unusual to see state or federal tax breaks offered to incentivize a company to keep a plant local. G.E. recently decided to move a plant to Canada. One major incentive was that they do not have to supply health insurance to their em-

ployees. No cost, no negotiating a rate, no managing the paperwork, etc.

Presently, individual states are working on plans to supply healthcare to its citizens. Why give tax breaks if we can incentivize by helping our own citizens?

California is planning a 2.3 percent sales tax to fund statewide health insurance. Nevada is planning on having Medicare as an option in the

health exchange. Both of these plans are very basic, with relatively high deductibles, but individuals can buy supplemental insurance at a much more reasonable rate, or not, if they wish. Once these go into effect, how many companies will then choose to stay in, or move to, these states?

Robin Zimmerman
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PEOPLE

Machinists rep Joe Kear retires

Joe Kear, 65, retired June 19 after more than three decades in the union movement. Kear joined Machinists Local 1005 as an employee of Freightliner in 1984, and became a full-time union rep for District Lodge 24 in 2005. There, he helped negotiate and enforce contracts for about 1,000 workers, including mechanics at UPS, machinists at ConMet, and assembly line workers at Freightliner, which became Daimler Trucks North America in 2008.

When wave after wave of layoffs reduced the Portland truck plant workforce by more than two-thirds, Kear helped win trade-related benefits for laid-off workers. Daimler workers struck twice while Kear was their representative, in 2007 and 2013. The strikes might have seemed inconclusive at the time, but Kear thinks both ended up working to members' advantage: A provision on severance pay in the 2007 contract helped keep the plant open, and the fact that workers demonstrated a willingness to strike in 2013 may have resulted in a more generous contract offer from Daimler in 2016.

In fact, it might be fair to credit Kear for keeping the Portland plant open altogether. In 2009 Daimler announced plans to close the plant, but reversed that decision after Kear brought some unforeseen consequences to their attention: Under a quirk of federal pension law, closing the plant would have obligated the company to pay a mammoth "withdrawal liability" to the union-sponsored multi-employer pension plan.

Kear grew up in Chillicothe, Ohio, south of Columbus, and got interested in politics early. His first strike was as a student, when he helped organize a campus walkout at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Kear dropped out of college, after two years, to work full time for the Cleveland office of the Student Mobilization Committee, which organized nationwide demonstrations against the Vietnam War.

A committed socialist, he worked for many causes, including the United Farm Workers grape boycott, public school desegregation, abortion rights, equal rights for women, and

Latin American solidarity.

He also came out as a gay man at the dawn of the modern gay rights movement. He helped organize Cleveland's first march for lesbian and gay rights in 1973. In 1976, he moved to Miami, where he later fought against a campaign led by singer Anita Bryant to repeal a local gay civil rights ordinance.



Joe Kear

After moving to Portland in 1979, he joined AFSCME Local 189 while working at the Portland Water Bureau.

When Kear joined Freightliner in 1984, Local 1005 meetings were Thursday nights. As a swing shift worker, he was unable to attend, so he helped amend local bylaws to change meetings to Saturdays so workers on all shifts could attend. In 1989 he won election as shop steward. He was later appointed to the office of educator, and the Executive Board. He was elected secretary-treasurer, and later vice president for District Lodge 24. At that time, union business reps were appointed by the district lodge president. Kear helped win a bylaws change to have reps directly elected by members. He then joined a slate led by Bob Petroff and won election as a business rep in 2005. Kear won re-election, and then stayed on as an appointed business rep after Lodge 24 merged with the Woodworkers District Lodge W1 in 2011, becoming District Lodge W24.

As a labor union officer, he helped start Oregon's chapter of Pride at Work, the AFL-CIO constituency group for gay and lesbian union members, in the early 2000s. He also was a long-time advocate of the Labor Party, an effort to get unions to form their own political party. Kear attended that movement's founding convention in Cleveland in 1996.

District Lodge W24 rep Dwayne Panian will take responsibility for the units Kear represented.

In retirement, Kear plans to stay active in the local and in a union retiree organization. He'll also serve as a Democratic precinct committee officer for Skamania County, where he lives on 30 acres of timberland near Washougal.