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COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Kellogg's threatens to permanently replace strikers

The cereal-maker also wants to eliminate the union label.

By Don McIntosh

Kellogg's, one of America's most recognizable brands, is courting a lasting public backlash in its response to a strike now in its third month. About 1,400 workers have been on strike since Oct. 5 at Kellogg's plants in Battle Creek, Michigan; Omaha, Nebraska; Lancaster, Pennsylvania; and Memphis, Tennessee. Represented by Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco and Grain Millers (BCTGM), they want an end an unfair "two-tier"system they agreed to in 2015, and have voted down several company offers that failed to do that. Under Kellogg's two-tier arrangement, employees hired after 2015 get lower wages and benefits.

Last year, BCTGM members at Kellogg's worked 52 to 56 hours a week on average. They kept operations moving during the pandemic, and made it possible for Kellogg's to earn $13.8 billion revenue in 2020. Now they're making a stand for fairness.

Kellogg's, for its part, wants to maintain the two-tier system, and even proposes to stop putting the union label on cereal boxes.

On Dec. 7, the company escalated dramatically with an announcement that it intends to permanently replace strikers.

That drew condemnation from President Joe Biden, who said he was deeply troubled by those plans, adding that it ought to be illegal. "Permanently replacing striking workers is an existential attack on the union and its members' jobs and livelihoods," Biden said via Twitter Dec. 10. "I strongly support legislation that would ban that practice."

The PRO Act, which twice passed the Democratic house, but is tied up in the closely divided Senate, would outlaw the use of permanent striker replacements.

Online, union supporters have been monkeywrenching the company's efforts to hire scabs, filling out fake online applications to gum up the hiring process. A video by a union supporter on the social media site TikTok showed computer code he said was set to automatically creat accounts, fill in personal details, and upload résumés to Kellogg's job site.

Besides cereals like Rice Krispies, Raisin Bran, Froot Loops, Corn Flakes, Frosted Flakes, and Kashi, the company also makes Eggo waffles, Pop-Tarts, Pringles, Cheez-It, and the Gardenburger and Morningstar Farms meat alternatives.

Strike set to begin at Fred Meyer, QFC

As of press time, members of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555 were set to strike 6 a.m. Dec. 17 at Fred Meyer and QFC stores in the Portland area, Bend, and Klamath Falls—unless there's tentative agreement on a new contract by then. The two sides were scheduled to meet Dec. 14-16, after this issue went to press. Both Fred Meyer and QFC are owned by Cincinnati-based Kroger.

Local 555 has been in negotiations over a new set of contracts with Kroger since July. For previous contracts, Fred Meyer bargained together with another big grocery chain, Safeway/Albertsons, but this year the companies are bargaining separately. Members overwhelmingly authorized a strike in votes held Dec. 10 and 11.

The strike would be in protest of unfair labor practices. The union believes the company is underpaying workers and has refused to provide information requested by the union related to that.

"It's our sincerest hope that shoppers will not cross our line," said Local 555 spokesperson Miles Eschaia. "We have plenty of union stores in Oregon, including all Safeway and Albertsons stores. We hope after two years of serving our communities during a pandemic, customers will support us."

The union is also asking supporters to sign a petition at ufcw555.org/supportcard. –DM

City of Portland unions declare impasse

The unit of 1,180 city workers could strike as soon as Jan. 19.

A coalition of six unions at the City of Portland declared impasse Dec. 13, setting in motion a timeline that could end in a strike. Contract bargaining between the City and the District Council of Trade Unions (DCTU) has dragged on since July 2020 without success. Under Oregon's public sector collective bargaining law, both sides now must present their final offers by Dec. 20. Workers could give strike notice as soon as Jan. 9, and strike as early as Jan. 19.

DCTU bargains for over 1,180 City employees—members of AFSCME Local 189, IBEW Local 48, Machinists Local 1005, Operating Engineers Local 701, Plumbers and Fitters Local 290, and Painters District Council 5. DCTU's previous three-year agreement expired June 30, 2020, but members voted to extend it to Dec. 31, 2020.

DCTU leaders say the City's cost-of-living increase proposal—1.6% retroactive to July 1—is unacceptable at a time when real inflation is topping 6%. DCTU is proposing what amounts to 5%, plus an across-the-board increase of 1%.

"Through their agents at the bargaining table, we believe that Portland City Council has been unwilling to recognize the cost of the City's labor needs," said DCTU president Rob Martineau. –DM

JOBS

End of the line for Jordan Cove

Pembina pulls the plug on a proposed natural gas pipeline and export terminal in Coos Bay.

By Don McIntosh

The Jordan Cove project is dead, after eight years of fruitless efforts to get approval from state and federal regulatory agencies. On Dec. 1, the project's sponsor, Pembina Pipeline Corporation, notified the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) that it's withdrawing its application for approval.

Pembina and its predecessor, Veresen, had been pushing the union-supported project since 2013. The idea was to construct a 229-mile natural gas pipeline from Malin, Oregon, on the California border, over the Coast Range to the Port of Coos Bay. There, they'd construct a terminal where the gas would be super-cooled into a liquefied form, loaded onto ships and exported to Asia. The project would also include a new power plant to provide continuous power to the facility.

The effort to develop Jordan Cove began with Veresen Inc., a natural gas pipeline company based in Calgary, and continued after Pembina Pipeline, also based in Calgary, acquired Veresen in 2017. Backers said it would be the largest single construction project in Oregon history. Construction was to last 42 months and employ 900 construction workers on average and up to 2,000 workers at the project's peak. Project costs would total $10 billion.

And it was all to have been built union, under project labor agreements signed by several union groups in 2013. The prospect of those jobs made Jordan Cove a political priority for building trades unions, and the project had the endorsement of the Oregon AFL-CIO and strong support from the Oregon Building Trades Council.

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