

Nabisco Strike: A Lesson In Solidarity

Sean Cumming reports from the picket line at the Nabisco strike in Portland, OR

As Nabisco workers in Portland, Oregon, entered their third week of indefinite strike action, union organizers and the local community held a rally outside the gates of the snack food giant's Portland plant.

Amid a cacophony of beeping horns of support from passing motorists, 200 plus workers and well-wishers heard speeches from the Oregon Secretary of State Shemia Fagan, the Oregon head of the AFI-CIO, and the workers themselves.

Fagan spoke of the “fight for middle class jobs” and the need to stop corporations moving production to Mexico. However, other workers emphasized the need for solidarity and the importance of the strike to all workers.

Nick from Teamsters Local 162 was there in solidarity. “These strikes are important,” he told Marx21. “All our struggles are linked. We are fighting for the same things at my work. Our work contract is up for negotiation in the next few years and we as workers need to stand together. I hope this militancy can spread. This common anger at the way workers are treated can bring us all together.”



The strike has spread to the other remaining Nabisco plants in Virginia and Chicago, stopping production on American staples such as Oreos. Some of the chants at the rally included “no contract, no snacks”, and “no contract, no cookies.” Workers spoke of their centrality in the huge profits that Nabisco makes:

“This is my first time on strike,” said Ronda, who has worked there for 35 years. “We should have done it in 2016 around the pensions but now is the right time. They [Nabisco] tell us that they are not feeling it now but they will. They are going to feel it soon. Who is going to make the cookies? They need us.”

Nabisco, a subsidiary of the multinational Mondelez, has attacked workers' terms and conditions over a number of years, notably cutting pension contributions, healthcare, and paid overtime. But it has been the treatment of the workforce by Mondelez and Nabisco management during the pandemic that was the straw that broke the camel's back.

Striker Donna Marx has worked at the plant for 17 years, between chants she gave us a background on the dispute.

“Back in 2012 when Mondelez and Kraft split we began to notice the greed. More overtime, they stopped paying for the pension so some people were forced into early retirement. People who have been working here for 35 years are getting

nothing. We were told we were essential workers, we are working through the pandemic and are told we are not worth the \$2 an hour extra. They want us to work 12-hour days while the company has made more profits than ever....it's not about winning or losing to me; it is about fairness. Honor the contract, pay us what we are due."

After bakers at the plant, represented by the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco and Grain Millers (BCTGM) union, went on strike, the picket lines were joined by engineers, electricians, and drivers represented by Teamsters local 206, and the electrical workers in IBEW local 48. This show of cross-sectional support has been vital, Donna tells us, "People are angry, all over but here we have a union, we are all one. When one goes out, we all go out. The engineers are out with us, the electricians are out, drivers are not crossing picket lines."

Teamsters Local 162 and DSA member Jesse spoke at the rally about the need for deepening this fight and generalizing it across all sectors. "I'm not here because I know your struggle, it's because your struggle is my struggle, it is the struggle of all the working class...we need to win because this won't just be a victory for the bakers but a victory for our class."

Workers emphasized the way that solidarity and work has pulled them together. The workforce is diverse. Like in a lot of manufacturing, workers here are drawn from across the community but immigrants and people of color make up a large portion.

Striking worker Victor told the rally, "I like to say we are a united nation of workers, we respect each other. Mondelez have shown us no respect. We will never give up, we will fight together."

The strike is holding, and the support of the community will be needed to win. For the workers at Nabisco, and those at the rally, it is clear that a victory here would be important, not just for the community, but for the working class as a whole. That is why we as socialist must support the fight. We must follow the example of the workers at Nabisco. We can learn from them and use their example to show other workers that if they fight they will be supported, but even more that they can win.



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