

**WORKERS
WILD
WEST**

THE UNOFFICIAL
**BAKKAVOR
BULLETIN**



LATEST NEWS FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR

ISSUE #1

OCTOBER 2017

This newsletter is a way to spread news between the Bakkavor sites. What is management doing in the other sites? What are workers there thinking and doing? We hope workers will share their stories with us...

“You guys are always giving out leaflets but what are you actually doing to help us?!”

We are NOT the GMB. We are NOT another union. We are a group of local workers sick of these work conditions and the limits and stress it puts on our lives. We cannot do anything FOR you. Only YOU can do that. But we will try and support workers’ own actions.

Bakkavor workers need to find their own voices and power. We hope this newsletter can help Bakkavor workers:

1. keep informed about what is going on across the factories;
2. meet or make connections with other workers from the different sites;
3. use this information and connections to start fighting back against management who want to carry on paying us bad wages and increase our stress.

Get in touch!

Write to us. Talk to us when we distribute. If you want to meet, tell us when and where. If they want us to talk to workers at the other plants and create a link, tell us. You don’t have to give your name. Are you being bullied or do you know someone who is? Are health and safety rules not being followed? What tricks do the managers do when there is an audit? The more of us who share information, the better this bulletin will be!

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Doston! Agar noukri mein ya makaan ka malik se ya migration office pe aap ki koi samasyaa hai aap ham ko sampark kar sakte hain. Akaela hamari zindagi mushkil lakti hai, saath-saath ham bahot kuch kar sakte hain. Ham ko baataye: aapki noukri mein kya haalat? kya musibat? kya umeed? Hindi mein message bhej dijiye ya email pe sampark kijiye. Majdooron ke beech, ham logon ke beech imaandaari rishte aur dostipan phaelana mushkil lagta hai, lekin mumkin hai. Zaroorat hai!

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**WE NEED
YOU**



Bakkavor continues to make millions of pounds in profit and it pays us peanuts. They tell us they can’t afford to pay us more but when the government raises the minimum wage, they suddenly find the money! The question is: how do we change things without being victimised? How do we start trusting each other and supporting each other against bullying managers and work pressure? Christmas is coming and things will get busier. Let’s not give ourselves a heart attack because this company is squeezing us more and more!

PAY DEAL FINALISED - NOW WHAT?

The last few months has seen a lot of grumbling:

“The pay for most of us is still not good enough!”
“The union is corrupt and doesn’t do anything for us.”

It is easy to complain. And blame others for our own lack of action. But one thing is clear: we can only rely on ourselves to make our situations better. We need some ideas and some courage.

One of the reasons why we started this newsletter is the latest pay deal. At the beginning all workers were angry about the pay offer, but in the end we accepted it. What happened here? And can we change things in future? Let’s look at what happened step by step...

1. GMB – all talk...

Last Christmas (2016), GMB put up notices in all the sites saying that workers deserved £10/hr. They said they would fight for us. They said we needed more because we lived in London and this was a ‘living wage’.

2. No news is bad news...

Between January and June we didn’t hear much. The union updated us: “positive and constructive negotiations” were taking place! Quite a few workers moved from Cumberland to Elveden because production was down there. People talked about how ‘business was bad’. Meanwhile people carried on doing more work, the stress never went down.

3. Union and management together with their “great pay deal!”

Finally in July, after a lot of build-up and false-starts, some managers stood at the front of the canteen and waffled on about the details of the pay deal. They were so complicated that nobody understood what they are talking about. At Cumberland the GMB dude just stood there like a silent mouse. At Elveden the GMB guy mumbled something about how this deal was great and the union supports it. The women didn’t raise their voices because they are not confident talking english in a room of a 100 people. Some people

asked critical questions but basically, it is all a show and we know it is a lame deal for most of us.

4. The ballot

Later that month, we have a vote on the new pay structure with four new skill grades: base; semi-skilled, skilled and supervisory. Most people we spoke to were unhappy with this deal. Some people were talking about an overtime strike but didn’t think other people would do it.

In August it was announced that 62% of GMB members voted to accept this pay deal. We were not told what percentage of the whole workforce voted. There were some rumours that voting procedures were not being followed *and reps were misleading people* but nobody kicked up a fuss. GMB reps pressured ‘un-skilled’ workers especially to accept the deal, even though it was not in their interests. It was a predictable and pretty depressing result.

Skills? Women don’t have skills!

People started raising some awkward questions. For example, the difference between what is classed as ‘unskilled’ and ‘semi-skilled’ looks pretty random. Why is a woman on the line making one samosa a second, or folding a chapatti at high speed on the ready-meal line, ‘unskilled and getting only £7.65?’ But a man in the cookhouse or despatch is ‘semi-skilled and gets £8.30?’ Most of the women’s work is seen as ‘unskilled’. This is discrimination. We heard that one brave woman at the Cumberland site raised this issue but she was ignored. All women on the line in low care, high risk and packing have been sold out by the union to keep other sections of the (male) workforce happy.

So why didn’t the anger turn into action?

“What is the point of doing an overtime strike – nobody else will do it so why should we? They will just bring in more agency workers. We need a proper strike instead!”

“Nothing will ever change anyway...”

Continued Overleaf >>

We distributed a leaflet suggesting an overtime strike for one week. This would show the management we were not happy. But there was not enough trust and unity amongst the workers to make this happen.

At the same time, union reps were talking all the time that this was the best deal we could get and we should vote for it. Bakkavor managers told workers about the deal rather than the union, which made open discussion about the offer in our own languages difficult. Some groups of workers in particular were really angry e.g. those in hygiene. But just writing a complaint letter to HR will not work. Extra energy is needed by us if we want management to listen. E.g. if hygiene workers wanted to coordinate an overtime strike, they would have to get in touch with other hygiene workers in the other sites, which they did not do.

Making it an 'individual problem'

In August, people were sent letters telling them what skill level they were in and what their pay would be. They were told to individually come to the HR office if they have a problem with the skill level they have been given. But this is not an individual problem. All the employees at Premier Park were put on the semi-skilled rate, no matter what job they did. It is classic divide and rule. What is the effect? We turn against our co-workers and start complaining:

"I work harder than that person, but they are getting more money. They are lazy. That's not fair!"

But the real problem is the fact that the base rate, semi-skilled and skilled rates of pay are still rubbish! We should ALL be getting £10 minimum. Living on less in London should not be acceptable.

We should not follow the bosses' logic that our wages are an accurate reflection of our efforts and skills. This is not what the new skill/pay grades are. The lowest wages are given to those who the management thinks won't fight back, whose english is worse. Dividing us by 'skill' is a classic tactic to divide us and weaken us.

We all agree that 'unity wins.' Unity means not pointing out which workers are 'lazy' and undeserving. Unity means sticking together, covering for each other, not snitching to the bosses, keeping clear who we really should be angry with: not other workers like us getting a crappy wage but the big managers driving around in their fancy cars that they only have because of OUR blood, sweat and tears.

So what next??

We should not see this pay deal as the end of the story. The management carries on trying to trick people into signing new contracts with lower skill grades with no GMB rep present. As another busy christmas period comes, the line goes faster and the pallets are stacked higher. Red caps get crazier and people collapse. So what can we do?

** We should all stick to our job descriptions.

If you have been categorised as unskilled or semi-skilled, we should not use any machinery that is not in our job description. We should not train any new people or tell them how to work- this is a supervisor's job and we are not paid enough to do it!

**Women should kick up a fuss about their 'unskilled' status.

Women can ask their GMB reps what information was used exactly to determine the pay differences between their 'unskilled' jobs and men's 'skilled' jobs. Using certain machinery or strength is not a good enough reason. Working on the line is the HARDEST job. You need a tough mind and tough feet! And fast hands! This is skilled work! Some groups of women have already written to HR but we will need to think about how we can back up our words with action...

OTHER NEWS FROM AROUND BAKKAVOR LONDON

Hygiene (all sites)

Hygiene workers across all the sites are angry that the work they do, which involves being trained in the handling of deadly chemicals, is counted as 'unskilled' in the new pay scale. Their job is dangerous, often handling noxious chemicals in confined spaces where the ventilation has not been working properly for ages. The bosses themselves recognise that they need special training to do their job. If you have to be trained, you've got a skill. Simple!

Latest from GMB

New officer, Mick Dooley held a fiery meeting in September. Around 60 Bakkavor workers attended, more women than men. He said he would not have agreed to this pay deal. Some managers are deciding themselves what skill grades people get and they are not doing this fairly. The same job is being graded differently between factory, departments, shifts, or even with two workers working together doing the same job! He said that workers will have to contest this through the grievance process. They should use this meeting to argue for the pay grade that corresponds to the highest paying job they do, even if they only do it on and off. So for example, if you help set up machines, even if you spend most of the time on the line, you should argue for a machine minder pay grade. If this is refused, we should refuse to do any work above the pay grade we are given. He thinks individual meetings are better than collective meetings but we are not sure why. Yes, it would give management more paperwork to deal with, but we think it is also a good idea to have 1 hour meetings of all departments at work during work time without management present, to discuss the situation. This is what the GMB should organise.

Fire at Abbeydale

On the 8th of October there was a fire in the Abbeydale low-risk. Agency workers had to be sent home. This is not the first report of fires we have heard from our co-workers, but in the case

Abbeydale this is especially worrying as in 2009 the site was destroyed by a fire. Do you know of any other major accidents at Bakkavor? Get in contact with us so that all Bakkavor workers can know the risks they are taking!

Cumberland packing (day-shift)

Break controls are random and unfair! Permaments and agency workers in packing at Cumberland must now sign in and out when they have their breaks, and because a SEF rep writes the exact minute we are in and out, management knows exactly how long we take. We can't arrive one minute late but we have to change shoes, clean our hands and put our coats. Because of this our breaks are never 30 minutes long!! The cleaners are also subject to more break control and more control by management in general. Packing workers and every one subjected to this control have had enough and should stop signing during their breaks!

Production (day shift)

Some of the production managers in low-care think that loudness is the same as leadership. Some of them seem to want to keep shouting even long after the poor person they are shouting at has done what they wanted. This is not management, this is bullying, and we should stand up to it. If the entire line stopped work whenever our bosses treated us like dirt, they would soon learn to treat us with respect.

Elveden

Elveden place recently had a very good result on an audit. Efficiency is up, waste is down, all thanks to our hard work. We are told well done, keep it up! But do we benefit from this hard work? All the money from that efficiency is not going to go to us, but back to the big bosses as profit. If we want to demand more than the 15p raise many of us have to put up with, maybe an audit is an excellent time to make our demands?