

New York bakery staff push for union, claiming they were forced to bake for Israeli fundraisers

Breads Bakery workers demand better pay and conditions and criticize chain for supporting 'the genocide in Palestine'



A Breads Bakery booth at a food festival in New York on 16 October 2021. Photograph: Monica Schipper/Getty Images for NYCWFF

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Workers at popular [New York](#) City bakery chain Breads Bakery announced a move to unionize, claiming it has “underpaid, undervalued, disrespected, discriminated against, intimidated and hurt” staff, as well as supported “the genocide happening in Palestine”.

The company, which has ties to [Israel](#), expressed concern that “divisive political issues” had been introduced into its stores. “We make babka; we don’t engage in politics,” a spokesperson said.

But staff involved in the unionization drive claimed that employees were forced by the chain to create products for fundraisers for Israeli organizations, and unable to decline.

The union, Breaking Breads, claims that more than 30% of the chain’s 275 workers across New York City had signed union authorization cards, seeking to unionize with United Auto Workers Local 2179 and pushing for better pay, improvements to working conditions such as the replacement of broken equipment, and respect on the job.

“The owners are the ones who are making it political,” one worker, who requested to remain anonymous for fear of retaliation, said. “All of us in the union, we have lots of many different political beliefs, things we stand for. We’re not telling anyone how they should behave, what they should believe in, where they should donate their money, absolutely not.

“But imagine you’re a baker who works at this company, and you’re witnessing videos that are coming out of Gaza that are really difficult to bear, and then your boss tells you that you’re going to be making a new specialty bread item that’s sold special and discounted as a fundraiser for a country that’s doing a genocide.

“We’re just asking that workers have the decision about whether or not they can make those.”

Breads Bakery uses profits to “materially support the Israeli occupation” of Gaza, the union claimed. The bakery chain has [six locations](#) in Manhattan, and was co-founded by Danish-Israeli baker Uri Scheft.

The bakery has hired union avoidance consultants, according to the worker, who claimed they had been meeting one-on-one with staff in office meetings, in a effort to deter support for the union.

“My location makes around \$15,000 to \$20,000 a day on average. We’re a bread bakery. We sell a lot of bread. We have several shelves of bread,” the worker said. “And for almost around a year now, we have not been able to use equipment that we really need to function.

“Our three demands are for equitable pay, respect, and safety for workers. I joined this unionization effort, because after long enough at Breads, I started noticing these sort of patterns. We have a very high turnover rate. Most people are only there, on average, maybe around three or four months, and I really think a lot of that can be attributed to the disrespect that is shown to workers by management.”

The union is calling for pay increases across the board; holiday and busy season pay, including Jewish holidays; overtime pay; automatic raises over a set period of time; premium pay for late-shift and overnight work; replacement of broken equipment; proper uniforms for workers doing outdoor work; guaranteed hours every week; a free meal each shift; and at least three days’ notice of each shift schedule.

A spokesperson for Breads Bakery did not comment on the hiring of union avoidance consultants, or the criticism of the bakery supporting Israeli fundraisers.

“Breads Bakery is built on love and genuine care for our team,” the spokesperson said. “We celebrate peace and embrace people of all cultures and beliefs. We’ve always been a workplace where people of all backgrounds and viewpoints can come together around a common purpose, sharing in the joy and love of a bakery, and we find it troubling that divisive political issues are being introduced into our workplace.”

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