

UFCW disavows aim of organizing Walmart workers

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The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW) has disavowed any intention of seeking to organize Walmart employees, at least for the immediate future. The union, in the face of charges that it had violated the National Labor Relations Act, made an abject climb-down.

Walmart had claimed that the UFCW and its allied organizations, Making Change at Walmart and OUR Walmart had set up picket-lines at Walmart stores for more than 30 days with the intent of seeking recognition for the union without, however, filing a petition for a union election.

In response, UFCW lawyers and officials contacted the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and worked out a deal that resulted in the setting aside of the company's complaint, pending the union's full compliance with its commitments.

In a January 30 press release, the NLRB reports on the terms accepted by the UFCW: "It [the union] disavowed any recognitional or organizational object; It promised to maintain such a disclaimer on the Making Change at Walmart and OUR Walmart websites; It promised not to engage in any picketing or confrontational conduct that is the functional equivalent of picketing for 60 days; It promised to publish a notice on the Making Change at Walmart and OUR Walmart websites expressing its disavowal of any recognitional or organizational object; and It promised to mail the above notice to its supporting organizations and OUR Walmart members."

Finally, should an NLRB regional director find in the future that the union has violated the restrictions on picketing and protest, the latter would not contest a temporary injunction against picketing, i.e., the union gives the courts in advance the right to suppress its own protests.

In the department of giving up without a struggle, this action by the UFCW ranks up there.

The letter sent by the UFCW to the NLRB, which the union posted as directed on the Making Change at Walmart web site, is even more explicit and cowardly. The union explains, "OUR Walmart has no intent to have Walmart recognize or bargain with it as the representative of Walmart employees. Nor does the UFCW International Union (UFCW) have such intent." It repeats this promise three times in the two-page letter.

The UFCW further explains, "We have removed the United Demands document and any documents stating a [union] recognitional objective from the Making Change at Walmart website, and we will no longer distribute either the United Demands document, the Rob Walton letter [addressed to the Walmart chairman], or any document stating a recognitional objective."

After months of encouraging Walmart employees to stick their necks out, risk their jobs and, in some cases, face arrest, the UFCW officialdom has revealed its own position. The union's *one and only interest* is the defense of its assets and good standing with the courts and the government. UFCW President Joseph Hansen easily makes it into the top one percent of America's earners, with total compensation in 2011 of \$361,124.

The UFCW's public concern about the miserable wages and conditions of Walmart workers is entirely feigned. The union's actions have been driven by worries that Walmart and other giant retailers were driving unionized chains to the wall and it was losing dues-paying members in the process.

However, given the history of sellouts carried out by the AFL-CIO unions, their bureaucratized and anti-democratic character, and general inability to defend

any gains made by workers, the UFCW is not an attractive organization to many Walmart employees. The union has been able to organize only scattered and extremely limited protests because workers are not prepared to put their livelihoods, meager as they are, on the line to become members of such a discredited outfit.

In reality, the UFCW has never had any serious intention of organizing Walmart. On the one hand, it has been seeking to gain a slice of the firm's workers as dues-paying members and, on the other, it has tried to use the protests as a means of applying pressure on Walmart management to win a lucrative "seat at the table."

The UFCW's crawling to the NLRB and Walmart management over a minor violation of the anti-democratic National Labor Relations Act provides some indication of what Walmart workers could expect if the union were to become their bargaining agent.

Various phony "left" organizations, who hover in the orbit of the union hierarchies, have made various claims in recent months about the UFCW-led protests at Walmart. This, we were told, was part of the return of "Class Struggle Unionism." The International Socialist Organization (ISO), for example, described the union-organized stunts at Walmart, involving handfuls of workers, as "inspiring walkouts."

The WWSWS quite rightly has rejected these claims. (See "ISO offers sophistry in the service of the trade union bureaucracy") Walmart workers and others should take a warning from the UFCW's actions. The fight for decent conditions and decent lives will require, first and foremost, a conscious rejection of the UFCW, the AFL-CIO and the Change to Win Federation. New rank-and-file organizations, armed with an understanding of the character of the capitalist system and a determination to fight it tooth and nail, are needed.



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