

Kroger workers: Break the UFCW-imposed isolation of our struggles! Unite to fight for higher wages and better working conditions!

Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Committee
26 June 2022

The following statement was ratified by the newly-formed Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Committee as its founding statement. To contact the committee and for information on how to join, fill out the form at the bottom of this article.

To our brothers and sisters at Kroger stores across Central Indiana and the US:

At the beginning of the month, 8,000 workers voted down a sellout deal by an overwhelming majority which would have kept wage increases far below the rate of inflation.

We voted down the pitiful \$0.50-\$1.00 average “raises” that the UFCW agreed to in the last proposal because there is no way that anyone could live with such a deep pay cut. Inflation in the Midwest is up 8.8 percent and increasing at a breakneck pace, higher than the national average. We work long hours in physically and emotionally demanding conditions for less than \$15 an hour, while executives like CEO W. Rodney McMullen are showered with multi-million dollar bonus packages every year.

But the United Food and Commercial Workers Union Local 700 has kept us on the job for an additional three weeks, is dragging out negotiations with Kroger and leaving us in the dark about what is being discussed behind closed doors. On June 15, the union announced that it would extend the contract until July 15, and that they would not even return to the bargaining table until June 30.

This is not what we voted for when we rejected the contract! UFCW reps told us at the time that a “no” vote was a vote for a strike. Many of us are prepared to sacrifice for a strike if it will be a step to winning our demands for higher pay.

Why are we not on strike now? If there was nothing to discuss on June 15, then we should have gone on strike on June 15, instead of giving management an extra 15 days in which nothing would change. We want to unite with our coworkers across the Indianapolis area, and with Kroger workers around the country, in a common fight for living wages.

Instead, the union is working to divide us up and isolate us, while they work out a contract behind closed doors with the company. Under such conditions, a second deal cannot be any less of a sellout than the first. We workers want to fight because with 8 percent inflation we can hardly afford to live and therefore have nothing to lose. But UFCW officials, like the director of national bargaining committee Kevin Williamson, make six-figure salaries, which makes them far closer to management than to us. They are on the side of management, not us.

Throughout the process, the union has repeatedly sought to twist our arms and lie to us to get their and management’s way. For the first contract, the UFCW tried to push a “yes” vote, and gave us less than 48 hours to see the pamphlet for the last tentative agreement, and some workers had only a few hours to look it over based on their shift. But they could not pull the wool over our eyes so easily. The “no” vote was a powerful expression of solidarity and determination on our part.

During the contract negotiations, we have pushed for information from union reps but they have stonewalled us and given inadequate, inconsistent answers when we demand to know what’s being discussed in the negotiating rooms. The union has left us with nothing to go on except rumors.

UFCW representatives at our stores have been coming up with every excuse they can to justify caving in to the company’s demands and washing their hands of a planned betrayal. We’ve been told that the only reason that grocery workers in Colorado received a \$2-\$3 per hour raise was because the minimum wage in the state was increasing, not because the UFCW had any hand in negotiating it.

This is baloney. In Indiana, a living wage for the average adult with one child is at least \$29 per hour—not the \$15 per hour that the UFCW, the SEIU and other unions claim is a “livable wage.” Even a \$2-\$3 wage increase would be eaten up by inflation in a matter of months in Indiana.

Where has the UFCW been for us when our coworkers were getting sick with COVID and we had to work twice as hard while the company scrapped our \$2 an hour hazard pay bonus? Where were they when Kroger workers in Louisiana and Texas demanded details of the contract they pushed through to avoid a strike that the workers wanted?

The UFCW has a playbook. It is a corporate playbook and not in the interests of the workers who pay them dues. Kroger workers across the country have been betrayed by the UFCW time and again for the past two years. We're divided by regions because it helps to keep costs low for Kroger.

Kroger is the largest grocery chain in the US, with 465,000 workers at its family of stores across the country. United, we know we can be a powerful force and can win our demands. Instead, the "union" works overtime to keep our struggle isolated from our brothers and sisters in California, Colorado, Louisiana, Texas, Washington state and more.

The UFCW doesn't work for us, but works for Kroger. To unite our struggles and to win, we, the rank-and-file workers, need to take control in our own hands. Therefore, we hereby announce the formation of the Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Committee. This committee will fight to reestablish rank-and-file control over the entire process, develop solidarity and collaboration among Kroger workers across the US, and expose and fight against the betrayals of the union bureaucrats. **It is open to all Kroger workers around the country, not just in Indianapolis.**

We propose to our coworkers that we take up the following demands:

- **No more contract extensions! Hold strike votes at all Kroger stores across the region!** Like our brothers and sisters in Colorado, California, Louisiana and Texas, we have shown that we are willing to strike if necessary to win our demands. The UFCW is the 10th wealthiest union in America, and reported more than \$1.1 billion in assets to the Department of Labor in 2021. There is ample money for the union to provide strike pay for us to maintain our standard of living during a strike.

- **End the information blackout! Workers must have full oversight of the negotiations and voting!** We demand all contract talks be livestreamed and recorded to give every rank-and-file worker the chance to know what the bargaining committee and Kroger management are discussing. We demand at least one week to study and discuss any contract proposal with our coworkers, live online voting, and for workers to count the ballots.

- **End the region-based bargaining system! For a nationwide contract for all Kroger workers!** Kroger is a massive corporation with operations all over the US and the world, but the regional bargaining system leaves us divided

state by state, and even city by city, to face this behemoth by ourselves. This is 100 percent in the interests of the corporation. We cannot win our fight against this multi-billion dollar corporation, backed by international finance interests, if we are divided. We must unite and fight together to expand our struggles among the broadest sections of workers, nationally and internationally, if we are going to win our demands.

- **A doubling of pay for all hourly workers. This is necessary to keep up with the current rate of inflation and to make up for concessions taken in previous contracts.**

- **Fully paid health benefits for all workers and their families and enforcement of science-based safety measures to stop the spread of COVID that is ripping through the workforce.**

- **An end to short-staffing and grueling work schedules and for all part-time workers who desire full-time work to be granted full-time positions immediately.**

We urge all Kroger workers across the US to join and build the rank-and-file committee. Our committee has the potential to do what the UFCW will not: establishing lines of communication and coordinated action between workers across Kroger stores in Indiana and the US, and draw the broadest layers of workers in the food production and distribution industries behind our struggle on a national and international scale.

Our lives and the lives of our brothers and sisters in the rest of the working class are all being crushed by inflation and the unmitigated spread of COVID. What we do in the coming weeks will have an impact for the rest of the working class. Everything will be determined by what we do in this struggle. Our allies are in the working class worldwide, and they are watching us closely. Let's show them we will not be intimidated and will stand up as one to win our demands.



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