

UFCW announces second tentative agreement for Kroger in Indianapolis

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7 July 2022

Kroger workers in Indianapolis are livid over the second contract proposal which the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) union is attempting to push through. On Tuesday, UFCW Local 700 announced that they reached an agreement with Kroger for a “new, three-year contract,” weeks after workers rejected the first one.

It is clear even from the UFCW’s self-serving “highlights” handed out to workers in stores Wednesday that this is not a “new” contract. The UFCW has not indicated when workers will even be able to look at the full contract. Pay raises for workers at the top pay rate will only be \$0.65 for the first year and \$0.50 for the next two years. For clerks in the Third Step, currently the highest tier, pay will only “rise” to the poverty level of \$17.60 an hour by the end of the contract in May 2024. For the lower two tiers, clerks will make just \$15.75 in the First Step and \$16.50 in the Second Step by the end of the contract.

The UFCW is trying to sweeten the pot with signing bonuses that will barely put a dent in the rapidly increasing costs of food, gas and housing. Full-time workers at top pay who are not leads or department heads are being enticed with a pitiful \$2,500 bonus and part-time top pay workers just \$1,000, which will be reduced through taxes and union dues. The highlights did not even list signing bonuses for non-top pay workers.

There have been no changes from the original proposal on the number of personal days and vacation time, regardless of seniority. This is in spite of the fact that workers have worked long hours for months to make up for being chronically short-staffed due to the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and unsafe working conditions.

“It’s the same contract in different wording,” one

worker told the WSW. “It doesn’t appear than anything has changed. Popeye’s pays more than this starting out. The union sold us out. They don’t care about us... Kroger is getting exactly what they want.

“The union won’t let us have any oversight. They’re hardly a union and don’t take anybody’s suggestions, except Kroger’s. Everyone in my store that I’ve talked to is dropping the union if this passes.”

Another Central Indiana worker questioned the UFCW’s counting of votes for the last proposal. “I am in full agreement that it looks like the same thing just presented ‘clearer.’ They said last proposal had only 56 votes more for ‘no’ than ‘yes,’ but I can’t find a single person that voted yes.”

Another worker said, in reaction to the latest proposal, “I feel it’s bull and we all need to stand up for one another and go on strike! We deserve better!”

Comments on social media have proceeded along the same lines:

• “No changes, just the same contract reworded. Voting NO again!”

• **“VOTE NO! SAME CONTRACT AS LAST TIME.”**

• “Considering y’all didn’t seem to actually do anything I see another round of NOs coming! Hopefully this time with enough for the 2/3 needed to strike.”

• “It’s like the UFCW doesn’t want us having time to read through a contract thoroughly. Why do y’all always leave out information on an online format? Must be garbage again.”

• “This contract is still the same contract, nothing different about this contract. It so pathetic that these union rep is working for Kroger, not the employees. ... everyone should say hell no to this contract and go strike. Let Kroger suffer because they are letting their employees suffer. No no no no no to this contract also

it looks like they are helping the people in charge instead of the workers...”

- “It’s pathetic they are still going to use the same exact contract that got denied last time and they will try and enforce the same one and still push it through. I will vote no if I even vote... They are forcing employees to vote yes. It’s pathetic how they don’t care about us employees and don’t ever take our opinions into consideration. Union does nothing for us. I vote no.”

Workers are furious in particular that the UFCW has refused to call a strike even though workers are ready for it and a strike would have hit Kroger’s profits the hardest if they walked out during the July 4th holiday. The UFCW tried to shift the responsibility to workers for not meeting the arbitrary 2/3 majority “no vote” of those voting to call a strike.

But it was the UFCW who made it as difficult as possible for many workers to exercise their right to vote on the contract, and this time is no different. The voting will take place across three days only, from July 13 to July 15. There is no mail-in or online option for voting, and workers at each store will have only one-and-a-half-hour windows in which to vote.

On Wednesday, Local 700 posted that members of the negotiating committee and union representatives would apparently be in stores “to discuss the tentative contract and answer questions.” Like last time, many workers will be working shifts that make it inconvenient to vote in person at their store or will be on their days off, putting workers in a position where they either must travel to exercise their right or not vote at all.

This contract does not simply arise from “bad” individual union leaders. The UFCW is virtually a business unto itself controlling over \$1 billion in assets, according to federal reporting, controlled by an apparatus whose top officials make six figure salaries. Concerned only with protecting their Wall Street assets and lining their own pockets, the union stands with management against workers.

The contract must be voted down, but experience has shown this by itself will not be enough. Rank-and-file workers must take matters into their own hands by joining the Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Committee to organize a struggle not only against Kroger but against the betrayals of the UFCW, and demand strike action.

The committee, founded in the aftermath of the first contract rejection, seeks to break the union’s isolation of Indianapolis Kroger workers and unite with Kroger workers around the country as well as Costco workers, airline workers, health care workers and industrial workers throughout the world who are fighting against sellout contracts.



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