

Central Indiana Kroger workers: Vote “No” on the UFCW-Kroger sellout contract!

Kroger Workers Rank And File Committee

12 July 2022

The Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Committee urges our co-workers in Central Indiana to vote down the second contract proposal brought by the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 700 over the next three days!

Everyone who has read the highlights that were handed out to workers in stores Wednesday can see this is not a “new” contract, but a re-hash of the old one we rejected only weeks ago. 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 Highlights are not even “highlights” but “lowlights.” They are concessions through and through. Who has the UFCW negotiating team been negotiating for while we’ve been working under extensions through holiday weekends, making profits for the company? Why are we told we can only see the full contract after we ratify a deal we oppose?

The union is promoting these raises as being an extra bump on top of the less than \$2 increases that the company gave out in 2021. The UFCW is playing directly into the hands of Kroger and its shareholders by painting this out to be a good deal. In reality, all it does is help the company to continue amassing billions in profit off of our backs and pitting us against fellow Kroger workers across the US in a race to the bottom for the lowest wages.

The UFCW is trying to sweeten the rotten deal with signing bonuses that we know 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 bribed with a pitiful \$2,500 bonus. Part-time workers at top pay will get just \$1,000, all of which will be subject to taxes and union dues deductions. To add insult to injury, non-top pay workers are not even eligible for these meager sums.

The union that supposedly represents us is negotiating for Kroger and not the working class. It is time for us to take the initiative to organize to fight for our demands independently of the union.

First of all, we must formulate our own demands, a “red line” beyond which we will not accept any contract. We propose these include the following:

- Increase starting pay to at least \$29 per hour, the calculated living wage for an adult with one dependent child in Indiana;
- Return to the right to an eight-hour day with no penalties for workers who refuse overtime; and
- Fully-funded health care benefits for workers and their families, a defined-benefit pension plan (not 401K-based) for all workers.

Kroger and its major shareholders have more than enough money in their coffers that they’ve gained off of our labor to meet our demands for higher wages, better benefits and working conditions. In 2021, the corporation raked in \$30.3 billion in profit, a slight drop from \$30.9 billion in 2021 but significantly higher than \$26.9 billion in gross profits recorded in 2019. Its CEO W. Rodney McMullen took home an \$18 million compensation package in 2021, which was gained off of the backs of workers who barely survive on \$13 per hour.

The UFCW knows this, yet it’s plain to see that this “union” is more interested in defending the company’s goal of gaining more profits while we’re paid less than they are fighting for the interests of workers who pay dues every week.

Union reps are chronically unavailable when we have questions and patronize us when we express our desire to strike and raise concerns about vote counting. The UFCW is doing everything it can to ensure that as many workers as possible will not be able to exercise their right to vote by having voting be 100 percent in-person, with only a one-and-a-half hour window. This forces workers that are not working to come in on their days off or well before or after their shifts, or travel to different stores to vote.

The UFCW's strategy is to convince us that we should vote "yes" to the contract, not because it is good but because there is nothing we can do about it. But that is not true. We can not only vote the contract down, we can win substantial gains. But this requires that we organize a fight not only against the Kroger but against the corrupt UFCW bureaucracy.

To begin this struggle, we urge our co-workers to take the following concrete steps:

- Take measures against any potential ballot-stuffing by the UFCW. Organize groups of workers at each store to monitor the balloting and alert co-workers when we notice inconsistencies. This will send a powerful message that the UFCW bureaucrats are on notice.

- Demand an end to contract extensions. With every contract extension, the UFCW continues to put money into Kroger's pockets as we work under the pitiful hourly wages that were negotiated years before inflation hit record high levels. With each extension of the contract, the UFCW willingly extends the no-strike clause in an attempt to create a legal obstacle to our ability to unite as a class to withhold our labor power to stop the profits flowing into the coffers of the corporation.

- If the contract is voted down by less than two-thirds, demand that the bogus clause requiring a supermajority rejection of a contract before a strike takes place be waived. What does or doesn't happen should be determined by what workers want, not by some bogus provision which was only put in as an obstacle to a strike.

The basic problem is that the UFCW is run as an unaccountable bureaucracy, not as a genuine democratic organization. Workers in some locals report that top officials are not even elected but appointed. But even in cases where officials are elected, their

loyalty is to their salaries and to hoarding the hundreds of millions in union assets. This means that the fight of Kroger workers must begin with the fight to establish rank-and-file control.

We are 8,000-strong across the region, and over 450,000-strong across the US. If we can unite our struggles, we can win. But this can only happen if we break free from the isolation imposed by the UFCW and build this committee, which has the power to link up workers across industries, across the country and the world in a united struggle against corporate rule.

If you are a Kroger worker and you want to fight for these demands outlined above, fill out the form below and begin discussions with co-workers in your store today.



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wsws.org/contact