

# Kroger workers in Columbus, Ohio, to vote on sell-out UFCW contract next week

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*Are you a Kroger worker in Columbus? We want to hear from you! Fill out the form at the bottom of this page to tell us what you think about the contract and what you think you should be fighting for. All comments will be kept anonymous.*

Kroger workers are set to vote next week on another sell-out contract promoted by the United Food and Commercial Workers union (UFCW), this time in Columbus, Ohio.

The contract proposal is woefully inadequate to the needs of workers and is similar to the pro-corporate contract forced through by the UFCW in Indianapolis earlier this month. The base pay increase over the three years is a paltry 65 cents in the first year, followed by 50 cents in the last two years. But not all workers will receive even this low amount.

Top pay for clerks is currently \$17.10 and will only rise to \$18.25. As inflation continues to rise towards 10 percent a year, such raises are really a pay cut for most workers who will see the value of their raise wiped out each year.

Worse yet, the contract completely overhauls the progression system. Senior clerks will be “red circled” and elevated to \$17.75 an hour from the previous top pay of \$17.10, with a top pay rate at the end of the contract of \$18.75. Such a pay scale is entirely inadequate, and while less senior workers will receive a higher initial pay bump, all workers will have to deal with a draconian pay scale system designed to suppress wages.

New workers will be brought on at \$14.25 an hour, a raise from the previous starting wage of \$12. But new workers will have to wait an entire year before they can rise to the next pay scale. Before, workers received raises at established intervals throughout the contract, including a 50 cent raise after six months.

Now, only if employees work the average number of hours considered to be full time throughout an entire year (34 hours a week for the second step and 36 hours a week for the third step) will they move up to the next step. If a worker does not work enough hours, either because they were denied hours by the company or because they took time off, they risk failing to reach the next pay scale. Additionally, workers at the top pay scale may face a pay cut to the second step if they fail to work a weekly average of at least 36 hours in a given year.

Based on this pay scale, workers can be kept at even lower pay than the union and company claim it provides. A part-time worker who does not move up to the second pay tier will only make \$14.95 an hour by the end of the contract, just a 70 cent raise over three years.

Seniority from previous jobs is also capped at step two in the pay scale, which could result in a severe decline in pay for experienced workers searching for a new job.

The company will also measure average hours from October to September, and wage increases will only go into effect the January of the following year. This peculiar time table allows the company to not raise employees to the next pay scale until January 1, 2024, the final year of the contract.

Such conditions are untenable for workers in an industry whose workforce is comprised mostly of a caste of part-time employees who do not qualify for the nominally higher rates of pay and benefits for full timers, which were already pathetically low to begin with.

Kroger and the UFCW are attempting to bribe workers into taking this awful deal with a promise of a signing bonus of \$2,500 for clerks and department

heads and leads already at cap pay. Yet not all workers will receive a bonus and even those who do will see it heavily taxed.

The fact that the UFCW is endorsing such a contract is further evidence of its pro-corporate orientation.

Workers in Indianapolis rejected a similar contract a few weeks ago, only for the UFCW to return with the same contract with slightly modified language. The union claims that this contract passed by 60 percent, but not even half of the membership voted and even those who did vote yes reported that they did so because they believed that the union would not bring back anything better. Voting was deliberately scheduled in order to encourage the lowest possible turnout.

Not only this, but the union repeatedly attempted to intimidate voters into voting yes, claiming that Kroger could not offer more and lying to workers that contracts in Colorado and California did not include wage increases higher than the paltry 50 cents a year offered to them.

The mass opposition to this contract was demonstrated when outrage over the contract's passage was so intense that the UFCW Local 700 deleted its Facebook page to silence opposition to the contract.

UFCW Local 1059 is also clearly hoping to suppress turnout in an attempt to eke out a "yes" vote. Voting will take place on July 26 and July 27 from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. but only at select locations. Voting will take place at four hotels, a veterans association and the UFCW Local 1059 union hall in an attempt to make it difficult for workers to travel to the voting locations and cast their ballots.

The use of third party locations to hold the contract vote was also utilized by the UFCW in Colorado during the King Soopers strike earlier this year. The union claimed that the contract passed but refused to provide any vote tallies or even a percentage of votes cast in favor or against.

This record shows that, in order to fight for better pay, benefits and working conditions, workers need the means to fight back against not only management but the pro-corporate union apparatus. This is why Kroger workers in Indiana have formed the Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Committee. It calls on workers to reject the pro-company contracts and fight for rank-and-file control.



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