

One month after ramming through sellout deal in Indianapolis, UFCW Local 700 attempts to push through second deal at Fort Wayne

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Fort Wayne workers, join the Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Forum on Facebook for uncensored discussion outside of the control of management and the union bureaucracy.

A month after forcing a sellout contract onto the backs of Kroger workers in Indianapolis, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 700 has announced a tentative agreement with Kroger in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Voting will take place on August 18 and 19 and cover 2,600 workers at 22 stores.

The union is recommending a “Yes” vote on a contract that it refuses to show to workers. After announcing the agreement on August 10, the union released a terse list of highlights that failed to provide any insight into the contract's contents.

Providing highlights, instead of an actual copy of the contract, is a common trick by union bureaucrats to conceal the details of a sellout deal until after workers have voted on it. But even these highly manicured lists often include at least some information about pay or benefits. This announcement only claims the deal includes “Guaranteed pay raises and ratification bonuses” of an unspecified amount.

When the union sold out workers in Indianapolis, they were provided access to the contract before the vote, allowing workers to read and discuss the deal and organize a “No” vote on the first round of voting. Kroger workers in Columbus, Ohio were able to do the same after reviewing the inadequate contents of their proposed contract late last month.

UFCW Local 700 appears certain to avoid the same mistake. This time, it has only provided workers with four vague bullet points indicating increased pay, “Affordable,

quality healthcare,” “Retirement security,” and “Language improvement.”

Nearly zero information is provided about what these changes to the previous contract will actually entail.

The UFCW is making it as difficult as possible for workers to ask questions and discuss the contract among themselves. The UFCW 700’s Facebook page remains inactive after the local took the extraordinary step of deleting it in response to mass opposition to the claimed passage of the contract in Indianapolis, which workers suspected was rammed through with ballot fraud.

One worker responded to the agreement on the union’s Twitter page, asking “Is this everything? Doesn't seem very good. Indy got screwed over and had a better contract than this.” The union’s response was that members of the negotiating committee and union reps would be in stores to answer questions at a later date.

Given the fact that they have not even been given copies of the contract, Kroger workers in the Fort Wayne area should reject this contract on principle. The union declared that there will be pay raises but will not state what they are. This suggests that pay “increases,” as in virtually every other contract, are far below the current rate of inflation of more than 8 percent, amounting to a massive cut in real wages.

If the contract is worth voting in favor, then why is the union hiding what is in it? If the contract had pay raises adequate to meet workers’ needs, then the union should be willing to say what they are. Instead it is hiding the numbers to avoid confrontation with the membership and to head off the organization of opposition by workers themselves.

Any contract which is pushed through under such

circumstances can only be the product of collusion between the union and the company. On August 3, UFCW Local 700 announced that it was extending the contract, which would have expired on August 6, to September 3 and that negotiations on the new contract would begin on August 9. Just one day after negotiations began, the union has come back with an insultingly short description of the tentative agreement. The union may as well have provided no update at all.

There is no reason to believe that the union, after forcing through a terrible contract in Indianapolis and trying to do so in Columbus, has suddenly negotiated an adequate contract in a single day. Kroger, which has raked in massive profits during the pandemic, is on the offensive against workers, cutting hours and restructuring workers out of full time and top pay. If negotiations took over just one day, it can only be assumed that it was a formality for the union to sit down and receive its marching orders from management.

The UFCW has time and time again demonstrated its allegiance to the company. It does not operate as a workers organization, fighting for the interests of its membership, but as a glorified labor contractor exchanging the right to collect dues for maintaining order and enforcing pro-company contracts.

Kroger workers must reject the efforts of the UFCW and Kroger to attack their pay and working conditions. But a “No” vote on this contract is not enough. When workers in Indianapolis rejected their contract, the union forced them to vote the exact same agreement again, claiming it passed despite widespread opposition.

Fort Wayne Kroger workers need to build their own organizations, rank-and-file committees in every store, that can organize and coordinate opposition to both Kroger and the union, fighting for what workers know they need, not what the company and union say they can have.



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