

A message from Indianapolis to Fort Wayne Kroger workers

Vote NO on the UFCW's sellout contract in Fort Wayne, Indiana! Demand an end to the union information blackout!

14 August 2022

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

To our fellow Kroger workers in Fort Wayne, Indiana:

The Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Committee urges you to reject the sellout contract this week brought by Local 700 of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union by the widest possible margin. We stand in solidarity with you as you prepare for a two-front fight against Kroger and the UFCW, which is doing everything possible to conceal important details of the tentative agreement that workers are voting on this week.

You should reject this contract and any contract voted on under these circumstances on principle. You should demand full copies of the contract and at least one full week to review and discuss it with your coworkers before even considering accepting any deal. The bargaining team which "negotiated" this contract in less than 24 hours must resign, and the rank and file must take over future negotiations and prepare for strike action. To fight for this, we urge our coworkers in Fort Wayne to join us in the Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Committee.

Our committee was founded earlier this summer in response to the sellout contract which the same Local 700 imposed upon thousands of us in Indianapolis. We see now they are using even more underhanded tactics in Fort Wayne than they used in the state capital to ram through the deal.

Our understanding is that you have, as of this writing, been given virtually no information whatsoever about what is actually in this proposal. In June, Local 700 gave Indianapolis a detailed booklet about the contents of the first tentative agreement. Armed with detailed knowledge of this sellout, we voted down the company-friendly tentative agreement for our region by a wide margin.

The UFCW learned their lesson—not that they should come back with a better deal that met our demands, but that they should not give workers full and accurate information about the

contract! Verbally, what we were told by our reps and negotiators in the Indianapolis region was not consistent or even accurate. When we were voting on the same contract that we voted down for a second time, the UFCW claimed that it passed. We are unsure of how exactly it was able to pass in the face of so much opposition, and when we demanded answers from Local 700 officials, they could come up with nothing and hid from us by deleting their entire Facebook page.

Now, the "highlights" they are giving you contain no information at all, only assertions that the contract contains wonderful gains which are not explained.

Lessons of Indianapolis: What to look out for in this week's vote

It is safe to assume, especially given the fact that the union and management did not even need a full day to reach a deal, that the contract is essentially the same as the one in Indianapolis. This "pattern bargaining," in which one sellout establishes the framework for the next, does not benefit the workers, who create Kroger's profits, but Kroger executives and their lackeys in the bureaucracy.

Expect waves of various union reps and officials to visit your stores frequently over the next few days to influence your vote. Don't be surprised if you even see Kroger corporate-level big shots, all the way down to store management, attempt to "explain" how wonderful and great this sellout contract will be.

In Indianapolis, workers got a letter from the Kroger division president gushing with praise and appreciation for how valuable we apparently are and how she thought this contract reflects it. We even got a follow-up letter this week repeating that expression of gratitude. But gratitude doesn't pay the bills,

especially when inflation is still over 8 percent.

You have the right to know the exact amount of the raise you will receive each year—which in Indianapolis was below inflation for many—and who will receive the “ratification bonus” that the union will dangle like a carrot in the face of workers facing a difficult financial situation. A number of Indianapolis workers were misinformed and were led to believe they were eligible for this money, when in fact they were not. The consequence of this misinformation was to sway the vote in favor of the contract that Kroger and the union were trying to push.

Be aware of health insurance changes in the contract. If you are currently on the Silver health care plan, it may be taken away and you will choose either a Plan A or Plan B, meaning your weekly premium will go up or down \$5 per week.

Be aware of the 3-step employment plan that divides workers into tiers and pits workers against one another in the same store. In theory, under this system, new or future hires could attain Step 3 (top pay) more quickly. However, it is based on a 52-week average, and with the company in control of scheduling and controlling your hours, it will be to their advantage to cap part-timers at 35 hours per week to prevent you from getting to Step 3. If you are currently at Step 3 and fall under 35 hours a week, your pay will drop, and it will take another 52 weeks to become eligible to regain the top pay and benefits.

You pay dues to the UFCW, but the UFCW shows through its actions that it is not an organization that represents workers. The UFCW is acting as a junior corporate partner for the Kroger corporation and has refused time and time again to listen to us workers when we made it loud and clear on the floor and on social media that we would not accept contracts with below inflation wage increases and that we were willing to go on strike for it.

The UFCW’s real class allegiance is demonstrated by the concessions contracts it has negotiated and pushed through behind the backs of workers all across the country through undemocratic means.

No secret deals! For rank-and-file control!

Do not be intimidated or give in to pressure by the UFCW or company to vote “yes.” You must know what you are voting on before you agree to anything. Therefore, organize to vote down this contract by the widest possible margin. If it’s your day off, go to a store to vote. If you’re on third shift, please stay over or return to the store to vote. Organize carpools to help coworkers who may need help with transportation to get to a store to exercise their right to vote. The union designs the voting system

to inconvenience workers and suppress the turnout.

Be on guard against any attempt to stuff the ballot. Find a way to observe the counts daily! Get several volunteers to go to each location where the counts will occur and trade contact information with members from other stores.

The organization to defeat this contract must be carried over into a broader fight. The UFCW will not respond any differently to a contract rejection than it did in Indianapolis. Even if it doesn’t come back with a second vote right away, it may also bide for time and keep you on the job with no updates, as the UFCW is doing in Columbus, Ohio.

In acting in such a way, these bureaucrats have forfeited their right to lead. In their place, we Kroger workers must organize ourselves. Form rank-and-file groups at your stores and affiliate with the Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Committee. Join the Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Forum Facebook group to communicate with Kroger workers around the country outside of union/management censorship. This kind of communication is essential for us now.

We are fighting to build a national network uniting Kroger and other grocery workers across the country. We are fighting against this bogus “bargaining” system in which the UFCW bureaucracy conspires against us with management.

Kroger is a national corporation whose investors have not just national, but global financial interests. The only way that we can fight back against this corporation is to build our own leadership, independent of the UFCW, that will give us the potential to unite our power and no longer be isolated in the face of this common enemy in the corporate ruling class.

Using the age-old divide-and-conquer tactic, the company and the UFCW isolate us into contracts covering only small regions. We say there should be a national contract, covering all Kroger workers and its subsidiaries, guaranteeing a high quality standard of living, including:

- A \$25 per hour starting wage, adjusted upwards in areas with a higher cost of living, and with annual cost of living adjustments (COLA);
- Full health care plans, with no out-of-pocket expenses, as well as pensions; and,
- An end to all tiers. Equal pay for equal work!

Kroger workers are watching your contract vote closely in Columbus, Indianapolis and around the country.

In solidarity,

The Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Committee



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact