

Fort Wayne Kroger workers begin voting on phantom contract

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Are you a Kroger worker at Fort Wayne? Let us know how you plan on voting and why, and update us on the status of the vote at your store. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Voting begins today in Fort Wayne, Indiana on the contract negotiated between Kroger and United Food and Commercial Workers Union Local 700. Workers were not provided any substantive details on the contents of the contract and were only told their voting times earlier this week.

The voting schedule itself a clear indication that the union is attempting to suppress voting in order to ram through the contract. Workers are only given two sessions to vote at their stores: one in the morning and one in the later afternoon to evening. Some voting sessions will last two hours, while others only 90 minutes. Each store will also have only one day of voting, restricting the voting to only the people who can be present at the store on that day. Since workers have not been allowed to study the contract before voting, this is not even close to enough time to allow workers to read and review the contract.

Night shift workers will also be unlikely to vote, as they were not given sufficient time to plan to arrive at the store during their time off work.

Workers are being denied their most fundamental right to review and discuss the contents of their proposed contract. Every worker deserves ample time to read the contract and discuss it with their co-workers. The UFCW has told workers that they will see the contract when they go to vote. This fraudulent approach is tantamount to saying that voters will only know a political candidate's platform when they arrive at the polls.

By keeping workers in the dark over the contract, the UFCW is acting as the labor police of Kroger,

commanding workers to vote on a phantom contract.

Despite not being allowed to see the exact contract, workers suspect that they are being presented with the same rotten deal that was forced on their coworkers in Indianapolis. That contract was rejected once by workers for its inadequate pay raises and the maintenance of the multi-tier wage structure. It was then presented a second time with reshuffled language and a bold-faced lie from union leadership that all workers would receive a bonus, even though only some actually qualified.

Having seen the track record of the UFCW, workers know that they will find a rotten sell out waiting for them at their stores today. Nothing more can be expected from an organization rotten enough to lie to and deceive its members.

Workers voiced suspicion over the contract on social media. "So when do we get to see it?" one asked. "We are two days away from voting with only seeing pay. All it seems like is you and Kroger are dangling a carrot in front of us with the pay. We want to know more. What are you hiding? This is so shady. We should get it at least a week before.

"By the way," referring to a previous interaction with the administrator of the union account, "I did as you said last week and reached out to my union rep. But guess what? Like normal, no reply. You only see him when there are new hires, then he's out so fast. Grab a paycheck and run. Unions' best role.

"I think it's time to get new blood in the union or rank and file, and maybe, if worst comes to worst, look into a new union even if we have to start our own. One for the people by the people."

Another worker commented "Vote NO" followed by "The definition of 'worthless' needs to be updated to include Kroger unions."

These sentiments are held by many Kroger workers around the country. Workers were so angry with the passage of the contract in Indianapolis that the UFCW 700 had to delete the page to shield itself from criticism. The page remains down a month after that vote.

Worker opposition to these betrayals must be organized into a campaign to reject this pathetic contract by as wide a margin as possible. Workers should reject it on principle alone, declaring their disgust with the union for trying to keep them in the dark. If the contract had any redeeming qualities the union would have announced them. Only a pro-corporate contract would be hidden away from sight.

But a “No” vote will not be enough. It can only be the first step in the counter offensive of the working class against the bosses and the union. The lesson from Indianapolis is that the union will come back with the same rotten deal until it is passed. No act of deception or coercion is too low for the bureaucratic thugs at the UFCW, who allowed thousands of its members to be infected with COVID-19 and dozens to die while the bosses got even richer.

Workers must organize and build the Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Committee. They need an organization independent of the union, built by and for the rank-and-file membership. Not only is the union refusing to fight for workers, it is actively fighting against them. Workers need to leverage their collective power by organizing themselves against both attacks from management and betrayals from the union bureaucracy.



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