

Second union-backed tentative agreement for Columbus Kroger workers nearly identical to the one workers rejected in July

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United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1059 released a new fact sheet about its new tentative agreement with Kroger in Columbus, Ohio this week. The sheet makes clear that the deal, reached after only a single day of “negotiations,” is only a repackaging of the contract which workers rejected late in July.

The “new” deal was announced by the UFCW shortly after Local 700 claimed ratification of a new deal in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Practically no information had been given to workers there until the eve of the voting, which was organized into limited time slots in order to suppress voter turnout. Earlier in the summer, Indianapolis Kroger workers rejected a deal from Local 700, only to have the union ram through a virtually identical contract. When workers objected on social media, the local responded by deleting its entire Facebook page.

Despite the claims by the union that there have been “key changes,” there is in fact little difference. Wages increases are still below a dollar a year, as little as \$0.35 a year for some workers. The basic wage increases will still only be \$0.65/\$0.50/\$0.50 in each year of the contract.

The only noteworthy change is that department leads will no longer receive a signing bonus and will instead get an extra \$0.35 in September of 2023.

Such wage increases are insultingly low. Even the highest pay raises for new hires keep the starting pay well below a living wage, and senior workers are expected to accept just pennies for their years, even decades, of work.

Significantly, the contract retains the wretched new pay progression system designed to prevent workers from reaching top pay. Workers will only be able to

move up to the next highest pay scale in January of 2024, assuming they are able to accrue enough hours each week. Workers must average 34 hours a week over an entire year to qualify for scale two and 36 hours for the top scale. But if they fail to keep 36 hours a week—an increasingly difficult task for workers as Kroger continues to slash hours—they could be brought down a level on the scale.

The union cynically described the new pay scale system as reducing the number of steps to reach top pay, leaving out the basic facts, such as that the entire system is designed to allow the company to avoid paying top pay. Some workers may never even leave the first tier if they must take time off of work or are denied adequate hours.

It also described the guarantee that workers who reach tier two will not fall back to tier one as “wage rate protections.” This double speak by the union attempts to paint the pro-company contract in a positive light, ignoring the fact that the previous wage progression system never included the explicit ability to cut worker pay as the new one does.

Workers, who rejected the same contract by over 70 percent last time, have expressed anger over social media about the union’s attempt to ram through the same contract again. “What new deal? It seems an awful lot like the old deal,” said one worker.

Another responded “The only difference I see is they took away the \$1000 bonus and made it .35 raise. No thanks.”

Opposition to the deal appears very widespread, and many have expressed outrage with the union as well for trying to force a rotten pro-corporate contract through.

“I can’t figure out what’s more insulting,”

commented one worker. “Kroger’s completely disrespectful offer, or our PATHETIC union for pushing this agenda... this is insulting and shows a complete utter lack of respect and disregard for our people and their intrinsic value.”

Another said “What an absolute joke. Same contract with an additional .35 cent raise thrown in. And that great \$2500 bonus (net \$1295 after taxes). Our union is a joke and embarrassment.”

Kroger is the largest grocery chain in the country with roughly 250,000 workers and billions of dollars in profits. Kroger made a record-breaking \$4 billion in profit in 2021. That is after the lavish salaries, exorbitant corporate expenditures, and extensive stock buybacks the company uses workers’ labor to pay for.

Kroger has more than enough money to pay its workers what they need to live decent lives. Many longtime employees of Kroger have often noted that the company was once a decent place to work with enough pay and benefits to live on. But in recent decades the company has launched a massive assault on the living standards of its workers in the quest for ever greater profits. A recent report on the living conditions of Kroger workers found that nearly two-thirds of Kroger employees could not afford their basic needs.

Workers around the world are being thrown into struggle as they fight for their very right to live. Rampant inflation, crushingly low wages, and oppressively high rent are squeezing every cent from workers to fill the pockets of billionaires and fund foreign wars.

The unions have refused to fight against this attack on workers and have taken their stand on the other side of the line. Overpaid union bureaucrats have based their upper-middle class lifestyles on union dues and corporate stock portfolios. Unlike the years of militant union struggle, unions no longer fight for workers, but for their corporate handlers who ensure that their financial assets climb even when worker pay falls.

Workers must take their fight outside of the union by building rank-and-file committees, new organizations built by and for workers, that will take on the company and fight the betrayals of the unions. All Kroger workers who wish to take on this struggle are encouraged to contact the WSWS and build the Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Committee .



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact