

Columbus Kroger workers: Vote NO on the UFCW's "new" contract! Build support in the working class for a counter-offensive for better wages and working conditions!

Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Committee
25 August 2022

Join the fight against Kroger management and the corrupt UFCW bureaucracy! Join the Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Committee by filling out the form at the bottom of this statement.

Fraternal greetings to our fellow Kroger workers, sisters and brothers of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1059 in Columbus, Ohio. The Kroger Workers' Rank-and-File Committee urges you to vote down the "new" tentative agreement which you are voting on this week.

We've read the comments on social media and heard what you've said about the contract and the way the UFCW is keeping you in the dark. Like the workers of UFCW Local 700 in Indianapolis and Ft. Wayne, Indiana, you are outraged at the pro-company proposals of this tentative agreement and most of you want it voted down again. And as in those previous contract votes, the UFCW has tried to make sure you would not have enough time to read and understand the changes in the second proposal. Your reps have made themselves scarce or beat around the bush when you asked questions.

You may not think that the proposal is any different than the first one that you voted down. You would be correct. Indeed, the wage increases under the "new" contract, which tops out at a measly 65 cents an hour, are basically the same as the first which you rejected in July. Little wonder it took them only a day to "negotiate" the second deal!

If this proposal does not have everything that you are demanding—wage increases, health care coverage, working hours that will support your health and family life, and time off to take care of yourself and spend time with friends and family—then we encourage you and all

your coworkers to vote "No" on this company-friendly sellout deal!

The UFCW negotiated with Kroger behind closed doors to work out a deal that would benefit the profit interests of the company while they kept us on the job working through holidays and back-to-school rushes at Indianapolis and Ft. Wayne. They came back to us with highlights, but not a full contract, and even those were nearly exactly the same as the wage and health care concessions that we voted down the first time.

Indianapolis and Fort Wayne workers have recent experience with the underhanded tactics the union bureaucracy uses to ram through such sellouts. UFCW Local 700 gave workers as little opportunity as possible to vote, limiting voting at both cities to a couple of one and a half hour time slots at each store, and not providing remote voting options for workers who were taking time off or not scheduled to work that day. At Ft. Wayne, workers were given "highlights" which contained only vague assertions, not even one-sided or self-serving details.

In the initial vote, union functionaries tried to intimidate some workers by saying that a "no" vote would mean a strike that the union would isolate and provide next to nothing in strike benefits. But this did not intimidate us, because many of us were willing to go on strike in spite of the great sacrifice it would take. We voted down the first contract. We feel that nothing less than our collective power is what it will take to fight the unbearable working conditions and sub-living wages that the company has imposed on us for years and that the union enforced.

During the second vote on virtually the same contract, the UFCW announced that the Local 700 contracts had

passed with less than half of the membership turning out to vote. When Indianapolis workers took to the Local 700 Facebook page to question these dubious results, the union shut down the page entirely. It remains defunct to this day because it is completely unable to answer to the working class' demands in the face of its conscious betrayal.

This experience contains lessons for Kroger workers in Columbus. To counter the anti-democratic playbook of the UFCW, we offer the rank-and-file workers of Local 1059 some advice:

- First, mobilize as much as possible to defeat this contract and the union's attempt to suppress voter turnout. Organize carpools to the vote locations and attend and observe the count at your union hall on Friday. Note that there are some vote locations that have changed from last time! The union is trying to catch workers off guard, and we must be vigilant.

- Make sure your coworkers understand the proposal and exactly who is receiving the "ratification bonuses" (bribes), as workers recently in Indiana were misinformed and some who had voted for the deal in the expectation that they would get them ended up not being eligible. Some employees are being offered an additional raise in February, so make sure that your coworkers are clear on who is eligible and who is not. The retiree insurance is likely being delayed for this contract as well.

- Organize discussion among rank-and-file workers at your stores. Come up with your own demands to counter the pro-corporate proposals, what your "red lines" are, short of which you will not accept any deal. What do you need to live and take care of yourselves and your families? Don't accept what the company and union says is affordable. We know this is bogus, and there is more than enough money to meet our demands.

The company is recording high profits and the shareholders and CEO are being rewarded handsomely off the work of our "essential" work! We are working as hard and as diligently as we did at the start of the pandemic, at low staffing levels, and should be paid accordingly. We should NOT have to be carrying unreasonable workloads or be expected to work overtime due to the company's inability to staff and train workers adequately, decisions based solely on the profit interests of a few that our "union" has demonstrated are worth more than our safety.

We also want to encourage workers in Toledo and South Bend, Indiana to watch and learn from these powerful experiences, and prepare themselves to organize opposition to any pro-company proposals for their

upcoming negotiations.

Columbus workers should not feel intimidated by the union, but the opposite. The union, which is in bed with Kroger, will not back down even if you vote down this contract. But you can mobilize the widest support in the working class to defeat this. This includes Columbus area teachers, whose strike against terrible learning conditions was suddenly shut down in the middle of the night this week by the Columbus Education Association.

You can also build support from workers, including grocery workers, across the country and around the world. Workers everywhere are being thrown into a fight against the corrupt corporate-union labor-management framework which is responsible for decades of stagnant and declining conditions.

Kroger is a nationwide grocery giant and is backed by international financial interests. To fight this powerful enemy, we can't win with local and isolated contract struggles alone. In contrast to the nationalist and pro-corporate program of the UFCW, what we need is a program and organizational framework to unite these struggles into one, on the statewide, national, and international arena.

The well-paid local and international UFCW officials, some of whom make as much in salary as Kroger managers, showed on whose behalf they were negotiating. To have an organization that truly fights for the workers' interests, we saw that the only way forward was for us workers on the shop floor to build our own, the way that autoworkers, teachers and transportation workers around the world are organizing their own independent committees.

Form your own rank-and-file committee in your store to link up with ours. Join our Facebook group, the Kroger Workers' Rank-and-File Forum, which is independent of the UFCW and AFL-CIO apparatus. Invite your coworkers who want to fight back against this concessions contract. Stay strong and know you have our support!



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