

Columbus Kroger workers reject third sellout deal, vote for strike action

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Join the Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Committee to fight against the UFCW's betrayals! Fill out the form at the bottom of this article to be contacted with more information. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Kroger workers in Columbus, Ohio have rejected a third consecutive sellout contract from the United Food and Commercial Workers. The contract was defeated by 55 percent on a turnout of more than 6,700 workers who voted.

In the same vote, workers also voted to authorize a strike by 81 percent. The union had encouraged workers to vote yes regardless of how they voted on the contract. However, striking contrast between the defeat of the contract and the authorization to strike indicates that workers are fed up with endless "bargaining" from the union resulting in contracts which meet none of their demands, and are looking instead for a fight.

UFCW Local 1059 has forced workers to vote on essentially the same contract each time. One worker who spoke with the WSWS said "The first time they came up with a raise of \$1.65 over three years" plus a \$2,500 signing bonus, "which will be hella taxed, and a \$1,000 bonus in February next year for department heads, backups." They added that, "I would personally like to see a minimum of \$3 over 3 years – they can take that signing bonus, no one wants that super-taxed nonsense."

In the second contract offer, the worker pointed out, the company merely swapped out the \$1,000 February bonus to a 35-cent raise for department heads, backups, and top pay hired before 2005. The worker told the WSWS: "The third time they left all the things from the second time and added 15 cents to the final raise. So: a \$2,500 signing bonus, hella taxed, \$0.65 now, \$0.35 in February 2023 for department heads, backups, those hired before 2005, \$0.50 in fall of 2023 and \$0.65 in 2024. The 15 cents apparently came from some change they made to

specialty prescriptions."

They explained that "the company basically set a dollar amount they didn't want to go over and stuck to it. The only negotiating that went on was them sliding money back and forth to make it look like we were getting more."

When workers rejected the second contract they were simply told "continue to work," exposing the frustration of the union bureaucracy with the resistance of workers to its pro-corporate orientation.

So far the union has indicated it is desperate to avoid a strike and has called on the company to return to the bargaining table instead. But workers themselves have been very vocal in their support for strike action and their frustration over the union's failure to provide an adequate contract.

"The company can do better," the Kroger employee said. "We all see what kind of money the top dogs make and the bonuses they receive. A fraction of those bonuses alone could change the life of thousands of employees.

"Without us the company makes nothing." Reference some of its corporate slogans, he added, "We are the 'Heartbeat' of Kroger. We all live 'Our Promise' every day and clearly they don't care. We need to take a stand together and show them we mean business."

Another young worker with five years expressed frustration with the union and full support for strike action. 'We shouldn't be voting on the same thing over and over again. It's like the union and the company are on the same side. They want us to vote over and over again on the same thing until we say yes.'

"For me the most important issue is pay. I have been here for five years and I am making what somebody would be making starting out at most other companies. Everything keeps going up. Housing, food, clothes, gas are going up. How are you supposed to live when your wages aren't keeping up? People don't want to say, when

you can't make enough to live.

"The company doesn't care about us. They make us feel that we are totally unimportant, that we could be replaced at any time. They make me feel that I am nothing, that I am just replaceable.

"We care for our customers, we care for how things are going, but the company doesn't care about us and they don't care about the customers either. They just care about making money.

"I think a strike is necessary, everyone deserves a livable wage and they are not paying that. We all have to stick together. The union is not fighting for us. We are going to have to stand up for ourselves. We all have to unite together."

Some workers have raised the demand "Strive for 5," calling for a five dollar an hour raise to meet their needs and survive the onslaught of inflation.

Both the union and the company have claimed that there is no money to give higher raises. This is a lie. Kroger made \$4 billion in profit in 2021 and wasted untold billions on executive pay and stock buybacks.

Columbus Kroger workers have shown their willingness to strike and fight for what they deserve. But the corrupt union leadership has undermined them every step of the way. Any organization that spends just one day in negotiations and brings back the same contract that has already been rejected is not a workers organization but a gang of scabs.

Every attempt by the union to stall strike action and re-enter pointless negotiations must be opposed. Workers must organize with each other outside of the union to push for a successful strike. The choice to strike belongs to the workers, not the bureaucrats.

All Kroger workers who want to fight back against the company and the union betrayals should contact the WSWs and fight to build the Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Committee, a new worker's organization that will fight to put power into the hands of the workers, not the company or union bosses. For more information, fill out the form below:



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact