

Kroger workers furious after union claims sellout contract passed on fourth revote

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United Food and Commercial Workers Union local 1059 claimed a contract for Kroger grocery workers in Columbus, Ohio, passed Thursday night by a margin of 3,546 to 3,193. This was the union's fourth attempt to force through the same sellout contract that workers had already rejected three times.

Workers had held out against the pro-company deal, which offered only \$1.65 in raises and imposed a regressive new pay scale system that allows the company to cut wages by cutting hours, for almost three months.

One worker told the WSW, "I feel we should have fought for what we deserve. Kroger has not allowed me to live the same lifestyle I had with the rise of prices, my vacations and time off have been impacted and I feel Kroger should at least allow us to live as well as we were before the inflation. \$2.15 over 3 years is not enough."

The worker added, "The new contract does not have a raise built in for the entirety of 2023. We will go 14 months without a raise. I don't see the prices staying the same that entire time. They will only go up."

"I will say that I don't feel the union fought for us," they continued. "At the last vote they only let two [rank-and-file workers] in at a time to have a discussion with each individual about the most recent proposal. And they seemed hard pressed to get a yes vote, using scare tactics like telling them that Kroger will let us walk. This is the best contract given in the country so far."

Another worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "I knew it was going to be close, and it doesn't surprise me after hearing rumors about some of the crazy stuff reps were telling people."

Both the company and the union engaged in a relentless campaign of lies and scare tactics designed to intimidate and demoralize workers.

One worker reported that the union falsely told them that "If you go on strike you WILL lose your job"—not could but will—"If you vote no you won't get paid, if you

vote yes you will."

Workers who attempted to contact the union representatives were met with automated text messages addressing none of their concerns. "I heard from a few people a couple union reps were in stores saying this is the best we're going to get," the worker said. Both company and union were adamant that "Kroger doesn't have any more money to give. If we strike [they said] it could last 20 to 30 weeks."

This was clearly intended to cause fear over how people would afford to pay for rent and food while on strike. Kroger took similar measures, posting fliers in stores threatening workers that a strike would leave them without pay and encouraging them to cross the picket line should they walk.

Expressing the dire economic situation facing Kroger workers, one worker commented on social media that "We already had someone walk out because of this at my store this morning. I don't blame them. I should walk out because this contract is going to financially ruin me since I'm part time, but I'll also be financially ruined if I leave, so I'm unfortunately stuck."

Cynically, the union issued a statement after the vote, saying, "The process of ratifying a new contract is never easy, but it was your activism, strength, and solidarity that brought Kroger back to the table each time to continue to negotiate towards a contract that meets the majority of our members' needs."

Nearly every word in this statement is a lie.

What "is never easy" for the UFCW is overcoming the opposition of workers. The union was furious that Kroger workers had the gall to refuse their orders to vote yes.

Nor does the contract meet "the majority of our members' needs." A \$1.65 raise over three years does not even come close to matching inflation. However, the contract does meet the needs of the bureaucrats, who will continue to siphon dues money to pay their bloated

salaries, and management, the real constituency of the union apparatus.

It is false for the union to claim that there was any “negotiating” occurring at all. The contract remained the same all four times, with only minor modifications to language. Collectively, between the second and third rounds of negotiations, the UFCW spent less than 48 hours at the negotiating table. The bureaucrats simply sat down with management, worked out a few linguistic modifications, and went home.

Both the company and the union believed that if they kept returning the same contract and intimidating workers into voting “yes” they could wear down opposition and eek out a slim victory.

This is a common tactic used by the corporatist unions to force through sellout contracts across the country. It was recently used in Indianapolis against Kroger workers earlier this summer where UFCW 700 had workers vote three times before it got the result it wanted. It is also being used by the International Association of Machinists to try to ram through a railroad contract which workers already voted last month to reject by 60 percent.

Some workers on social media have suggested calling for a recount, noting that the margin of victory was roughly 400 and that half of the division did not even vote on the contract. According to the *Columbus Free Press*, workers reported that ballots with “vote marks outside the box” were discarded instead of being counted.

Given this, it is well within the right of workers to demand a recount of all ballots cast.

One former worker responded to the contract passage on social media, saying, “Recount? I may be a past associate but I have been through 3 contract negotiations. UFCW needs to be ran by the members of the union and not these people who are making [\$]70k+ to accept these terrible offers.”



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