

Indianapolis Kroger workers demand strike action after rejecting UFCW sellout agreement

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On May 31, more than 75 percent of Indianapolis Kroger workers voted down a tentative contract agreement negotiated by the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 700 with the grocery giant.

Despite the overwhelming rejection and the simultaneous approval of immediate strike action, the UFCW apparatus has kept workers on the job, fueling growing awareness among the rank and file that another betrayal is underway.

The vote is part of an expanding rank-and-file rebellion against the union bureaucracy by grocery store employees. Many workers now openly accuse the UFCW's corporatist leadership of collaborating with management to push through concessionary contracts.

The tentative agreement included only minimal wage increases—amounting to between 25 and 75 cents per hour over four years—while making changes to seniority rules that would further disadvantage part-time employees, who already make up most of the workforce. These raises do not keep up with inflation.

The contract also failed to address chronic understaffing, which has led to overwork, long hours and unsafe working conditions, as well as cuts to hours and benefits for part-timers.

There were no meaningful improvements to healthcare or scheduling, and many workers saw the contract as a direct attack on their livelihoods and dignity.

Amy Reynolds, a Kroger worker with 24 years of experience, summed up the mood: “With inflation, our wages are backsliding. You wonder if you can make it on a job like this.”

Another worker, Tari Blevins, warned that if the

contract passed, many part-time employees would be forced to look for new jobs elsewhere.

These sentiments were echoed by dozens of workers who spoke out at union meetings and on social media, expressing disgust at the UFCW's attempt to ram through a deal that would leave them worse off.

The union leadership's response to the contract's rejection has been to block strike action. UFCW Local 700 President Tracy Bartak acknowledged the vote but refused to call for a walkout, saying: “The rejection of the offer and the no vote means strike authorization was given by the membership to the local to use at the table at any time. We will reach out to the company to get back to the table and resume bargaining.”

This has deepened worker opposition, with many seeing the union as more interested in maintaining its relationship with the corporation and stifling the strength of the membership.

Kroger, for its part, has insisted that it is offering a “great deal” and has emphasized its reliance on the union to block workers from striking. A company spokesperson said, “We remain actively engaged in bargaining with UFCW because we believe the best outcomes are achieved at the table, not through disruption.”

But this message is familiar to workers, who have seen the company post record profits while their wages have stagnated and their workload increase.

The current struggle is not a new experience. In 2022, Kroger workers in Indianapolis also voted down a UFCW-backed agreement, only to see the union bureaucracy force through a revised contract that was a rehash of the contract that was rejected.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with Indianapolis

Kroger worker Tristan, who spoke about the recent rejection of the tentative agreement.

“I pay attention to what’s going on at Kroger across the US. Four years ago, with our last contract, the company was making record profits because of COVID. We didn’t even get a dollar raise. Now it’s the same thing this year. Kroger put all this money into buying Albertsons, billion dollars to acquire it, so I knew they weren’t going to do anything for us. So, I wasn’t surprised when the TA came to us with nothing.

“The workers are fighting two battles. There’s the fight with the trade union president and against the company. I’m really frustrated that we don’t get any updates from the union. It would be one thing if they were telling us what they were bringing to the company, but we hear nothing.”

Tristan also spoke about the isolation of workers from one another across different stores. “That’s another problem. There are so many people across so many different stores, but we aren’t talking to each other. There’s a store just two hours from us, and we need to communicate.”

When asked about how the workers in his store feel about the trade union leadership and the need for a strike, Tristan said, “If my store went on strike, I think 90 percent of us would stay off work. ... We want to walk out. We have a Facebook group of workers where people are trying to organize to put pressure on the president to have a meeting with us.

“We voted the TA down in 2022 too and then the union brought us the exact same contract again. This time we voted the TA down again, but by higher margins. I think everyone is ready to walk out.”

Across the country, Kroger workers in Colorado, Southern California, Washington and other states are engaged in similar contract battles, all marked by demands for better pay, improved staffing, and decent healthcare and awareness by the rank and file that workers are fighting a battle on two fronts.

The UFCW has systematically kept these struggles isolated, refusing to coordinate strike action or build solidarity across locals. The *World Socialist Web Site* has reported extensively on this pattern, highlighting the urgent need for rank-and-file workers to organize independently of the union bureaucracy and wage a real fight against the corporation.

On social media, workers are voicing their anger and

their growing awareness that their struggle is not just against Kroger but also against the union apparatus. One worker wrote on Reddit: “We voted 75 percent no and authorized a strike, but the union is just sitting on their hands. It’s like they don’t want us to win.”

Another worker posted on Twitter: “The union leadership is more interested in keeping their cozy relationship with Kroger than fighting for us. We need to organize ourselves.”

In private Facebook groups and forums, calls for independent rank-and-file committees and direct action are gaining traction, with workers sharing strategies for building unity and preparing for the possibility of a wildcat strike if the UFCW continues to block action.

The situation in Indianapolis is a microcosm of the broader crisis facing the entire working class in the US. As corporations like Kroger rake in billions in profits, union officials have become increasingly integrated into management structures, serving as enforcers of austerity rather than defenders of workers’ rights.

The result is a growing gulf between the aspirations of the rank and file and the priorities of the union leadership. The overwhelming rejection of the UFCW contract is a clear expression of workers’ determination to fight for real improvements in their wages, conditions and dignity.

The way forward for Kroger workers—and for all workers facing similar battles—is to break out of the isolation imposed by the union bureaucracy and build independent organizations of struggle. Only by uniting across workplaces and industries, and by taking direct action, can workers begin to reverse decades of concessions and win the gains they so desperately need.



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