

Indiana Kroger workers reject second sellout contract approved by UFCW Local 700

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Kroger workers: tell us why you rejected the sellout contract by filling out the form below! All submissions will be kept anonymous.

On July 11, 8,000 Indianapolis Kroger workers rejected a second tentative contract agreement negotiated by the leadership of United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 700. The first tentative contract was voted down by the rank and file on May 31 by a margin of 74 percent.

As of this writing, Local 700 has not released the vote totals. But even though workers also authorized a strike in their first vote against the contract, the union bureaucracy has said nothing about a job action and refused to prepare the workers for a walkout.

The tentative agreement included only a 90 cent increase over 3 years for starting pay and a \$200 Kroger gift card. Workers described this as “insulting,” and a slap in the face amid rising living costs and record corporate profits.

Veteran Indianapolis Kroger worker George Fish said, “Central Indiana Kroger made \$4.3 billion in profits in 2024. The union called for a ‘Yes’ vote on both contracts, arguing that this was the best we could get. We Kroger workers had other ideas.

“The main issue with the contract was too low wage increases which were well below the 25 percent price increase we’ve all had to face. For example, at top tier my wage increase would be only \$2.75 over three years or \$20.35 three years later, when I need \$22 per hour now just to break even.

“For lower wage brackets, it was even worse with the lowest bracket getting only 90 cents over three years.”

The UFCW Local 700 officials did not provide workers with a complete copy of the tentative contract and gave them three days to review the “highlights,” which included eleven bullet points. Among the items

on the list with no details were, “Protects quality, affordable health care for members and your families” and “Adds lifesaving coverage for transplant procedures.”

The agreement also failed to address widespread understaffing and deteriorating working conditions. As Fish explained, “I’d also add we have problems with understaffing and, since our starting wages are lower than what you can get elsewhere, Kroger has trouble hiring and retaining people. It relies on part-timers and teenagers.”

Fish commented, “Kroger offered a \$200 gift card that can only be spent at Kroger, which workers found insulting. Health care remained 2-tier, although transplants were now covered.

“Kroger did make one concession. It did agree to a three-year contract instead of the four-year contract which it wanted. Kroger seems to be trying to foist four-year contracts in right-to-work states—which Indiana is—as it did in Georgia.”

Fish said a group of Kroger workers are circulating a petition seeking 300 signatures demanding dollar wage increases—not cents—fair staffing language, and affordable healthcare. Workers have also raised the necessity of having greater job security against the threat of further automation and AI.

This is the second consecutive round of contract talks where workers have overwhelmingly rejected sellout contracts brought by the UFCW. In 2022, when workers rejected a sellout contract, the UFCW made them vote again and again until they claimed it was finally ratified. To hide from rank-and-file anger, the local responded by deleting its entire Facebook page.

Workers are once again furious at UFCW officials. On Facebook, workers reported being threatened by union reps who warned they could be replaced if they

strike, and said the vote was deliberately scheduled while many were on vacation.

In 2022, workers at Kroger formed a rank-and-file committee to oppose the union sellouts and push for strike action. In a statement, the committee explained that its goals were to “fight to reestablish rank-and-file control over the entire process, develop solidarity and collaboration among Kroger workers across the US, and expose and fight against the betrayals of the union bureaucrats.”

Such a rank-and-file rebellion is once again needed. The UFCW is engaged in a nationwide sabotage campaign against around 100,000 workers in numerous regions whose contracts are expiring or have expired and who are pushing for strike action. They are doing everything possible to pre-empt a national movement by ramming through sellouts one by one.

In southern California, where the contract for 45,000 grocery workers had expired, the UFCW carried out a series of empty “practice strikes” only to ignore its own strike deadline and announce a deal falling short of workers’ demands.

The ratification vote is widely suspected of fraud, suppression and manipulation. The number of ballots cast have not been released, while in some cases, union officials have claimed 85 percent of workers voting in favor of the sellout agreement, which included a dollar per year in wage increases or less. The workers were never given an opportunity to review the agreement and were only given self-serving “highlights” about the contract through Zoom “information sessions.”

In Colorado, UFCW Local 7 did everything to keep workers at the King Soopers and Safeway chains isolated from each other. It shut down a King Soopers strike at the start of the year with a “labor peace” agreement, then called a limited strike at Safeway in June. They kept King Soopers workers on the job past the expiration of the “labor peace” deal and then announced deals at both chains at the start of the month.

Once again, only contract “highlights” have been released by the UFCW and, in the case of the agreement with King Soopers, refers to, “Strong wage increases for top rates, grandfathered employees and department managers” without any details as to what these wages are.

There is enormous potential for a powerful

movement. In Indiana, working class support for the Kroger employees is strong. According to Fish, “The unofficial word is that unionized drivers at the Kroger warehouse in the Indy suburb of Shelbyville, members of Teamsters Local 135, would honor a Kroger picket line and not make deliveries which it does 7 days a week.

“Also, Pepsi vendors also Teamsters Local 135, would deliver to the parking lot only, not enter the store and set up.”

But the stronger workers’ position, the more openly and shamelessly the bureaucracy is acting against workers. The actions of the UFCW are of a piece with the sellout of the Philadelphia city workers’ strike by AFSCME earlier this month, which was called off without any gains when the strike was at its peak. In response, Philadelphia workers have formed their own rank-and-file committee to take the fight out of the hands of the apparatus.

Such committees must be built in industries across the US and the world as the scaffolding of a new movement in the working class. The enormous power workers have can only be used effectively once they establish their independence from the union apparatus, the Democratic and Republican parties and all the pillars of class rule.



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