

EW4D holds Indianapolis rally to dissipate opposition of Kroger workers to UFCW sellout contracts

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On Sunday, August 3, Essential Workers for Democracy (EW4D), a reform faction of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) bureaucracy, organized a press conference and rally in a parking lot next to a Kroger store in the East Gate neighborhood of Indianapolis.

This event, which attracted a handful of workers from the 8,000-member UFCW Local 700, was held in the aftermath of the overwhelming rejection by central Indiana Kroger workers on July 11 of a second sellout contract negotiated by UFCW officials. Although the union never released totals on the second vote, the first sellout deal had been rejected on May 31 by 74 percent.

At the press conference, rank-and-file workers took the microphone and criticized Kroger's greed and the poor working conditions at the multibillion dollar corporation's grocery stores. They denounced the low wages at Kroger, noting that pay has barely risen from "nickels and dimes" to "quarters" over the past two decades.

They spoke of the contracts they had voted down with disgust. The workers explained that the agreements presented to them by the UFCW would have most employees earning far below a living wage for Indianapolis and cleaning workers would be making just \$13.75 by the year 2028.

The workers described feeling insulted by the company offer—which was passed along to them by the UFCW bureaucracy—of a \$200 Kroger gift card instead of meaningful pay raises.

One worker, Sarah Ford, a pharmacy technician from Connersville, Indiana, said: "Our jobs are worth more than the \$17 an hour they pay technicians. As a pharmacy technician, people's lives are in my hands every single day, and I cannot help people as they deserve to be helped without the people or the hours to do so." Many workers expressed anger and frustration at being undervalued despite many years of service with the company.

Workers also criticized the lack of transparency and communication from the UFCW leadership and objected to being rushed into voting on contracts they found unacceptable. Amy Reynolds, a Kroger worker in Fishers, said, "Our union negotiations were happening behind closed doors. We didn't know anything about our contract until it was dropped right in front of us."

At the Kroger store across the parking lot, a front-end clerk who

spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* said, "I definitely don't feel like they pay us enough for all the BS we go through. Honestly, I've been feeling angry towards them for a long time. I've been in front end for the last six years and while I have been getting raises, it feels like it's not enough sometimes, especially when I feel like we have the most responsibilities overall."

These sentiments have been expressed by Kroger workers continuously throughout the months-long contract fight in Indiana. Just as they did in the 2022 contract fight—which resulted in the imposition of a rotten contract—Kroger workers in Indiana have shown a determination to reject concessionary agreements, fight corporate greed and conduct a genuine struggle for wages, staffing and working conditions that reflect their essential interests.

However, Indiana Kroger workers must be warned that the intervention of EW4D, which is promoting a group called O.U.R. Local 700, will not alter the situation facing Kroger workers. Far from it, the EW4D rally was organized to both dissipate the anger of rank-and-file workers and to promote the falsehood that the corporate stooges in the UFCW bureaucracy can be pressured into fighting the company and advancing workers' interests.

The UFCW is one of the largest unions in the US and has 1.3 million members in the US and Canada. Like every union within the AFL-CIO system, the UFCW is run by a corporatist bureaucracy that represents the interests of the employers such as Kroger, Alberston's, Safeway, King Soopers and others.

For example, UFCW International President Milton Brown has an annual income of more than \$300,000. This is around ten times the average income of workers in the grocery chain industry.

The relationship of the UFCW to the corporation is also proven by the fact it has been deliberately isolating the struggles of retail and grocery chain workers across the country for decades and forcing through contracts that serve the interests of the corporations in an industry with revenues of over \$200 billion.

While UFCW Local 700 is now planning to resume talks with Kroger on August 16, EW4D is preparing to set up workers for the third sellout contract that now being prepared and will be telling Kroger workers they have to vote for it.

What is EW4D?

Essential Workers for Democracy (EW4D), founded in 2022, is a nonprofit organization that functions as an adjunct to the UFCW bureaucracy. EW4D says it promotes “democratic unions that are accountable to members.” Its leadership, however, is made up of former union bureaucrats and functionaries of pseudo-left political organizations tied to the capitalist Democratic Party and the AFL-CIO, such as the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and Labor Notes.

Several of the EW4D leaders—including executive director Steve Williamson and organizer Caitlyn Clark—have a background of working for Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), a “reform” group now in the leadership of the union alongside General President Sean O’Brien, an ultra-right Trump supporter.

During the 2023 UPS contract, TDU functioned as the public relations arm of the Teamsters bureaucracy, which enforced a sellout agreement which has since been used to lay off tens of thousands of people. TDU, as with the entire union bureaucracy, has largely kept a guilty silence since then.

EW4D has been brought in because the UFCW apparatus knows that rank-and-file workers have a growing awareness that a battle is being fought against both the employer and the union misleaders.

Meanwhile, EW4D has set up its O.U.R. Local 700 organization in direct opposition to the Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Committee that was established to fight against the sellout contract negotiated by the UFCW bureaucracy in 2022.

The purpose of the O.U.R. Local 700 group is to ensure that the Local UFCW leaders do not lose control of the contract fight against Kroger. As part of this effort, EW4D is working to maintain the isolation of Indiana Kroger workers from their brothers and sisters across the country who are facing the very same fight.

In opposition to the mobilization of the massive strength of all UFCW members collectively in strike action across the country, EW4D is telling Kroger workers to rely on court rulings to defend their rights and to appeal to local Democratic Party politicians to sign their “Contract Unity Pledge” cards. Such campaigns expose EW4D to be a tool of the union bureaucracy against the kind of bitter class battle that is required for workers to win their demands.

Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Committee

While voting down sellout contracts is essential, bitter experience has shown that it is a first step in the fight for what workers need. An urgent necessity exists for rank-and-file workers to organize a new leadership that will take the contract fight completely out of the hands of the UFCW bureaucracy and expand the struggle to grocery store workers and other sections of the working class across the country.

In 2022, the Kroger Workers Rank and File Committee issued a statement that said, “This committee will 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. It is open to all Kroger workers around the country, not just in Indianapolis.”

Kroger workers must develop this independent initiative and take matters into their own hands against both the UFCW bureaucracy and its EW4D appendage.

The first order of business is a campaign to advance the demands of Kroger workers based on what is necessary and not what the company says it can afford. Any attempt by the UFCW and EW4D to present a contract that does not meet these demands must be met with a campaign by the committee to not only vote down the first contract but take control of the struggle into workers’ hands.

The next task is for the rank and file committee to prepare strike action that will shut down Kroger across central Indiana and to immediately end the UFCW’s isolation of the struggles and establish connections with workers across the country who are engaged in the same fight.

Finally, Kroger workers must reject all attempts to convince the rank-and-file that Democratic Party politicians will represent or fight for their interests. The Democrats, no less than the Republicans, are capitalist politicians representing the interests of the corporations, banks and billionaire oligarchy that exploit the labor of workers to accumulate their profits and enormous personal wealth.

The fight against Kroger—and its agents in the UFCW and EW4D—must be based on the necessity for a socialist program with the goal of taking the grocery chain industry out of the hands of the private corporations and reorganize it for the purpose of providing food for the public and not the profits of the rich.



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