

# Defying rank-and-file push for strike, UFCW bureaucrats bring third tentative agreement for Indiana Kroger workers

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*Organize a fight against the UFCW's betrayal! Fill out the form below for help establishing a Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Committee. All submissions will be kept anonymous.*

Indiana Kroger workers are being forced to vote this week on a third tentative agreement (TA) pushed by the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 700, after overwhelmingly rejecting two previous contracts. Workers voted down the first TA in May by 74 percent and rejected the second in July, though the union refused to release the vote totals.

The UFCW bureaucracy is moving aggressively to block a strike, despite widespread support for one among the rank and file. "I thought we were going to strike," one worker told a *World Socialist Web Site* reporter as she headed into her shift.

The contract is part of a nationwide campaign of sabotage being waged by the UFCW bureaucracy. Around 100,000 grocery workers in the UFCW have had contracts expire over the course of the year, but the bureaucracy is deliberately working to isolate workers from different regions and chains, and block a nationwide movement. It follows sellouts in Colorado and California, and other parts of the US.

The actions of Local 700 in particular are a repeat of 2022, when they forced workers to vote repeatedly on virtually the same contract until it was ratified. This late act of sabotage proves that workers must take matters into their own hands by founding a rank-and-file committee, and preparing a fight against both Kroger and their lackeys in the union bureaucracy.

## Anger over poverty wages and union collusion

Workers are furious at the UFCW's deliberate defiance of their demands for strike action.

"Would it not be worth a struggle for a short while to make sure that everybody gets treated fairly in our stores? Look at what utility clerks are making... They only get two 25 cent raises over the three years... Some of the people who are utility clerks have conditions that make it hard for them to do other positions. Why should they be paid less when they are going into parking lots in extreme weather, and cleaning up filthy messes?"

"Still a year at full time hours to get health coverage," a technician said. "As a part-time licensed pharmacy technician that is at a level 3, this shows that I will be making less due to the new step program? And I can't get full time status because we don't have the hours? How is this protecting the employees? For a union, this contract isn't the best especially after waiting this long.

"Gas prices are up, milk, even bread & water costs more. This is not enough to support our families on. We must demand more money. Stand strong.

"Guessing either the Union isn't listening or they don't care. This is the same contract except retro pay and it is being paid as a bonus so taxes will eat it up. So my answer is still no. Yes, we should of already gone on strike. All this is, is games."

"Still nothing added for people who have been with this company for years," another worker explained. "Making the same amount of money as teenagers walking through the door. Part-time people make up a

huge part of this company & will forever get treated like garbage.”

“Go screw yourself UFCW LOCAL 700,” one worker said. “Offer us the same Proposal 3 times. That will be a 3rd no..they work for the best interest of Kroger.”

## **What is in the contract**

The UFCW’s deal makes only cosmetic changes from the earlier proposals workers rejected. It offers a wage increase of \$2.75 for team leaders and store clerks, broken up into three tiers, starting from \$16.05 to \$20.35, with \$0.90 added in the final year of the contract.

New hires face a 12-month waiting period and only advance to the second tier if they average more than 30 hours per week, while advancement to tier three requires averaging 36 hours. Utility clerks are capped at \$14.75 by the end of the deal—well below the estimated \$32,000 minimum annual cost of living in Indiana. Pharmacy technicians remain trapped under \$23 an hour even at the highest levels.

The previous TA included a \$250 gift card, which has now been removed. Instead, raises are backdated to June 1. A veteran worker explained: “The only thing they did was take back the \$250 gift card and, to try and push it through, make the wage increases retroactive to June 1. So, if you are getting \$.50 raise, this means on a 40-hour week, you would get  $40 \times \$0.50 \times 12 \text{ weeks} = \$240$ . For those getting a \$.25 raise, it’s \$120 and those getting a \$.75 raise, it’s \$360.”

## **The rank and file versus the bureaucrats**

While grocery workers at Safeway, Stater Bros. and King Soopers have also expressed support for strike action, the UFCW has systematically shut down or betrayed struggles, forcing through similar sellout agreements.

In Indiana, the union is once again blocking

collective action. Having rejected two contracts, workers are being told to vote again until they “get it right.” The UFCW’s maneuvers are aimed at protecting Kroger’s profits, not defending workers’ livelihoods.

The experience of the past three months has made this clear: the UFCW will not organize a fight. Every vote, every “renegotiation” has produced the same result—workers are forced to vote on poverty contracts while a strike is blocked.

Ballot counting cannot be left in the hands of the union bureaucracy. In 2022, the Kroger Workers Rank-and-File Committee demanded direct oversight of negotiations and voting, and a national contract covering all Kroger workers. That fight must be renewed and expanded.

Workers must form independent rank-and-file strike committees in every store to:

Kick out the bargaining committee and replace it with militant workers elected from the shop floor. Negotiations must be livestreamed and reported daily to the membership.

- Hold emergency meetings to prepare strike action, based on the principle of “no contract, no work.”

These committees must be independent of all factions of the UFCW bureaucracy, including appendages like the Essential Workers for Democracy caucus, which are seeking to channel opposition back into the Democratic Party.

The task facing Indiana Kroger workers is to link up their struggle with grocery and retail workers across the country. By taking control of the fight into their own hands, workers can begin the national counteroffensive needed to secure livable wages, secure jobs and dignity at work.



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