

King Soopers strike enters second week as company seeks restraining order against strikers

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The strike of 8,400 King Soopers supermarket workers in Colorado is entering its second week today. The walkout of grocery workers, members of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 7, has affected nearly 80 stores across the Denver metro area.

Contract negotiations between the union and the company resumed on Friday, but only lasted 68 minutes after King Soopers President Joe Kelley reportedly screamed at the union bargaining committee before storming out of the negotiations.

Talks have continued over the weekend into the new week, with both the company and the union noting slow progress and that they are not close to an agreement yet. President of UFCW 7 Kim Cordova said that “We have moved more than 12 offers back and forth with the company. The company continues to not address our issues. They have not agreed to anything in terms of safety, health care, wages.”

So far, the strike has held strong against efforts by the company to break it with scab labor. Before the strike even began, King Soopers, which is owned by Kroger, attempted to hire scabs by offering \$18 an hour for temporary workers.

Despite this, workers have reported since the beginning of the strike that stores have struggled to bring in replacements, resorting to flying in salaried workers from out of state to help prop up the understaffed stores.

Even with the reinforcements from Kroger’s administrative staff, though, stores remain largely empty. Photos and videos of King Soopers stores shared on social media show shelves unstocked and stores devoid of customers as a highly supportive

community refuses to cross the picket line.

One worker who spoke with the WSWS said that store traffic had declined by 90 percent, and that among those that did cross the picket line, half turned around once they saw that shelves were bare.

Throughout the Denver area, parking lots at King Soopers stores are empty, with many people going out of their way to shop at other stores. “Even though King Soopers is much closer to my house, I drove the extra miles to go to Safeway as to not cross the line,” one worker said.

A worker for the Instacart delivery app said, “I don’t even feel right crossing the King Soopers picket line to work for Instacart, so Safeway and Sprouts only it is.”

The increase in traffic to other stores has caused a strain on workers and supply lines. Reports from Safeway stores show that shelves are going bare, and many items are out of stock. Safeway typically takes in 20 percent of Denver’s grocery sales, but with the community boycott of King Soopers, which controls a third of the city’s grocery sales, the increased demand is too much to handle.

One Colorado Safeway worker said: “[I’m] not in Denver, but close enough to be affected by the ripples. Things are bad enough that they’re asking stores from the surrounding areas for help. Traffic is double what it normally is, apparently, and there is no department that is on top of it. Apparently, some of those stores down there were messes before the [King Soopers] strike and the problem is just exacerbated now.”

The conditions at Safeway were made possible by the UFCW’s decision to keep Safeway workers, whose contract expired shortly after King Soopers, on the job on a contract extension. The decision has caused

frustration among some workers. One Safeway worker took to social media to demand of UFCW 7, “What are we doing about the Safeway workers who are now working 10-14 hours a day with no help and lines down the aisle all day and being ignored when requesting breaks or lunches? Corporate big wigs have been here all day and helping grocery and letting us suffer.”

Meanwhile, King Soopers is going on the offensive, attempting to secure an injunction limiting pickets at its stores. In its filing, the company calls upon the court to ban strikers from impeding entrance into the store and gathering in groups larger than five people. If the restraining order is approved, the legal definition of what constitutes “impeding entrance” will certainly be bent to the will of the company and used to attack workers’ most basic rights to assemble and picket.

Among the incidents alleged in the filing are that strikers told shoppers that the food inside was spoiled, that strikers “played loud music fairly consistently throughout the day,” and that “a picketer commandeered a King Soopers motorized handicap accessibility scooter and used it to patrol the store’s entrance while screaming at shoppers.”

Meanwhile, picketers themselves have endured threats of violence, including one incident in which several picketers were shot with a BB gun last Friday.

Workers across Colorado and the country must be mobilized to oppose the attempts by management to break the strike. Only the broadest possible movement of the working class can bring down the Kroger machine, which is the largest supermarket chain in the country and the fourth largest private employer.

But the UFCW is working to isolate the strike. In addition to keeping Safeway workers on the job, it also canceled planned walkouts at King Soopers in Colorado Springs, the state’s second largest city, at the last second without notice, despite a near unanimous strike authorization.

Last year, the UFCW canceled strike action in Houston, West Virginia and Arkansas, and called off a strike in Portland after one day, celebrating a \$1 raise as a significant win. One Arkansas worker said, “We were supposed to strike last 4th of July and then just...didn’t. After, Kroger stopped pulling union dues out automatically and forced the union to beg us to volunteer to pay them.”

Another worker said, “This legit just happened in

Houston division too, literally the day of the strike, they basically just said ‘lol jk,’ and nobody’s heard anything since.”

King Soopers workers must link up with Kroger workers around the country and with the developing movement of teachers and students who are walking out against unsafe conditions. It is the workers themselves, not the union bureaucracy, that has the power to act in their best self-interest.

We encourage all workers opposed to Kroger’s strikebreaking to contact us about building rank-and-file committees that will lead the growing movement of workers against the untenable pay and working conditions demanded by the bosses.



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