

# Bernie Sanders town hall covers for UFCW betrayal of King Soopers strike: See no sellout, hear no sellout, speak no sellout

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Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders held an online rally Monday night with Kim Cordova, President of the United Food and Commercial Workers union (UFCW) local 7, shortly after voting ended on a contract for 8,400 workers at the King Soopers grocery chain, who had been out on strike for 10 days.

The contract, which the UFCW claimed was ratified without publishing any vote totals, was a naked sellout which includes every red line which the union had claimed it was demanding. Wages under the three-year deal will start at only slightly above the new minimum wage in the city of Denver for most workers, with wage increases over the life of the contract well below inflation. Co-premiums have also been increased, especially for workers with family coverage. A new clause explicitly prohibits workers from taking sick leave out of fear of catching COVID-19, and the deal provides no meaningful protections against the spread of the virus in stores.

Finally, a letter agreement is included which stipulates that, in the event the UFCW negotiates an even *worse* contract at a King Soopers competitor, management has the right to unilaterally impose that deal on the King Soopers workforce.

The union abruptly ended the strike on Friday, in spite of remarkable levels of support from area workers who refused to cross the picket line by shopping at King Soopers, and called ratification meetings on the deal on Monday, in which workers would be made to vote on the deal after the strike had already been shut down. They were given no time to review the deal ahead of time, and the more than 8,000 workers were made to vote at a single location located far away from many workers' homes, at an airport hotel. Workers

took to social media before and after the vote to express frustration and anger on both the contract and the circumstances in which they were being made to vote.

The town hall was a publicity stunt for the UFCW, in which Sanders ran damage control for the union and sought to present the end of the strike as a victory. The pair spent nearly 50 minutes pining over the supposed success of the union, with Cordova declaring that “strikes work” and, somewhat defensively, that “we won, I’m telling you,” while Sanders argued for the supposed importance of the unions in presenting other workers with similar “victories.”

Indeed, the contract itself was such a naked betrayal that neither Sanders nor the union could even attempt to spin its contents in a positive light, and so nothing of substance concerning the contract was raised during the event. Neither Sanders, Cordova, nor two handpicked workers who appeared at the event made a single comment about the contents of the deal. All that was said about the contract was repeating Cordova’s bald-faced lie that “we won.” Their mantra throughout the event was “See no sellout, hear no sellout, speak no sellout.”

In one revealing episode, Sanders asked Cordova how it was that workers at the largest supermarket chain in the country could not afford to buy enough food. Sanders, however, was posing this question to someone who is jointly responsible for such conditions with management. The UFCW as a whole has been an active participant in the destruction of its members’ livelihoods for decades, allowing mega-corporations like Kroger to turn a once stable career into a position of starvation wages and oppressive working conditions.

An appearance by Sanders has increasingly become a

mark of death for strikes and other forms of protest by workers. Whenever Sanders appears on the picket line, or at a rally or town hall meeting, it is the clearest indication that the unions are in the process of betraying and shutting down a struggle.

This was the case, for example, in an appearance last month at a rally organized by the BCTGM union in Battle Creek, Michigan during a weeks-long strike by Kellogg's cereal workers. Sanders did not even acknowledge the existence of a tentative agreement (TA) which had just been announced by the union the previous day, and a leaked management email shortly after Sanders spoke revealed that the new TA was virtually identical to the one which workers had rejected weeks ago, and that Kellogg's was relying on the assistance of the union to push it through.

Sanders' role in promoting and maintaining illusions in the pro-corporate unions mirrors his role in Democratic Party politics. Sanders, who describes himself as a "democratic socialist," has long used this insincere label in order to capture growing discontent over social inequality in order to contain it within the Democratic Party.

On Sunday, the day before the town hall, Sanders made appearances on TV talk shows to cover for the complete failure of the Democrats to pass even a limited social spending bill, seeking to blame right-wing Democratic senators Kyrsten Sinema and Joe Manchin for the fecklessness of the party as a whole.

In order for workers to carry their struggles forward, free from union betrayals, they must take the measure of demagogues such as Sanders and begin to organize themselves independently of both the pro-corporate union bureaucrats and the Democratic Party.



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