

“I no longer believe the people in the union”: anger from King Soopers grocery workers over shutdown of their strike by UFCW

Alex Findijs
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The United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW) Local 7 announced late Wednesday night that the three contracts with grocery chain King Soopers had passed in Colorado Springs. King Soopers is owned by grocery giant Kroger and operates stores throughout Colorado and Wyoming.

The vote took place two days after voting in the Denver metro area, where the contract also passed. The union abruptly shut down a strike by over 8,000 King Soopers workers in Denver on Friday, forcing them back to work before even being able to vote on the deal.

The union has claimed that the sellout contract, which fails to address the most basic concerns of workers and offers inadequate wage increases for most workers, passed “overwhelmingly.” Yet, as with the earlier vote in Denver no vote count was provided by the union. Assuming a majority of workers did in fact vote in favor of the contract, it was not out of support for the deal, but because of the attempts by the union to browbeat them and present the contract as a fait accompli.

Workers who spoke to the WSWWS were suspicious of the declared outcome. They noted that time and space was limited, meaning that many workers were unable to even study the contract before voting.

“The votes were done in pencil on a 2 inch piece of paper,” said one worker. “No organization whatsoever. The [voting] location is far for everyone. With today’s technology why is this the only option? How many people didn’t get a say? They [the UFCW] were celebrating it as a win before we even got to see the details. Kim Cordova said they did this so the scabs didn’t deserve to know. When it was finally presented, it was done in the same way [the] company did. Almost as if it was the same person organizing the whole thing. I believe they threatened the things we already had so they could call

them gains.

“I think the strike was to justify their [the union’s] existence. They divided us by giving people in the middle of the pay scale what they deserve. Why [else] wouldn’t they just raise the top out wage to [give] them something to stay for? The journeymen I’ve spoken to all feel the company is trying to push us out.

“I’ve been with the company since 2007. I no longer believe in the people working in the union. I think some serious restructuring needs to be done. The whole meeting was disorganized. It seemed more important to coerce people into thinking we won. People are upset and no one is talking about it.

“I wonder how many hours the union people put in over the course of the contract. Throughout the pandemic we didn’t see a single union rep in my store. When they are in the store they aren’t equipped to answer any questions. Before the strike our store manager made them look like idiots by asking simple questions about what the union wanted from the contract. I think it was a staged fight. The company could’ve just stepped up and taken care of its people. I’m afraid for so many of those people that aren’t going to see it coming.”

Another worker from central Denver said, “I’m mostly just disappointed. The raise was so negligible that at this point I would make the same amount working from home for a call center, without the risk of COVID or violent customers.”

“We expected health care costs to go up, to be honest, since it’s been the same for like 5 years, but it’s disappointing that we don’t get any better health care because of it. They were talking about pushing for hearing coverage which a ton of folks need, and better dental and vision, and all they ended up with was slightly better disability benefits and those are still s***.

“My biggest disappointment is that they didn’t push harder to change health care coverage for non-full time workers. We could have changed it from a year to 90 days and it wasn’t even brought up. Starting wages are still below industry standard too. Those two facts combine to ensure that our hiring and retention issues continue.

“When I [asked about this I was told] that because they’re having the company offer more full-time positions, that it solves the problem. But we have thousands of part-time employees and they’re only offering a few hundred more full-time positions.”

Many workers know that they could have gotten more and deserved a far-better contract than the one they received. They recognize that their strike had the company on the run and that it was they who had the upper hand.

But the UFCW is a business in its own right; with over \$1 billion in assets it has become a leading contractor of labor to large corporations like Kroger for decades. This corporatist relationship between the union and the companies means that the UFCW ultimately acts to serve the interests of the bosses, not the workers.

Last year, the UFCW either canceled strikes or ignored strike authorization votes by Kroger workers in West Virginia, Arkansas, Houston and Portland. It has also played a key role in keeping meatpacking and food production workers on the job in spite of mass infections, including at the JBS beef plant in Greeley, Colorado, where six workers have died of COVID-19.

This weekend, nearly 3,000 Kroger workers in New Mexico are voting on whether to authorize strike action. Together with their coworkers in Colorado and around the country, they must learn the lessons of the King Soopers strike and begin building new organizations, rank-and-file committees, to oppose the betrayals and sellouts of the UFCW.



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