UFCW calls off King Soopers strike, agrees to 100 day “labor peace”

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King Soopers workers: What do you think about the abrupt end of the strike? Let us know by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

The strike by 10,000 grocery workers at Colorado chain King Soopers was called off Monday night after the union and the company announced they would restart talks. The sellout and premature cancellation of the two-week strike called on February 6 breaks the momentum of the strike and secures no real gains for workers, only the withdrawal of the company’s “last, best and final offer” and an agreement to restart negotiations over the next 100 days. According to the union, no negotiations have actually been scheduled.

On Monday afternoon the union released a statement that the company and the union had been unable to make any breakthroughs in restarting negotiations, saying “we are unfortunately no closer to a resolution than we were before the strike” and that “Workers will remain on the picket lines.”

Just a few hours later, however, the union flatly contradicted itself when it declared that “through the power of our action and unity, UFCW Local 7 have secured a return to work for all striking workers,” sounding more like management than a workers’ organization.

According to the agreement, the company will not be able to unilaterally implement any offer for the next 100 days and has agreed to not lock out workers during this time, nor will workers be able to strike within the next 100 days. Workers who originally would have lost their health coverage, due to a reactionary clause in the contract basing eligibility for coverage on hours worked, will also still be covered in April.

Workers began returning to work Monday night and will fully return by Thursday the February 20.

Significantly, the union did not secure the data on sales or staffing that it claimed was necessary to put forward its own proposals for staffing and wages, which it has not done during the negotiations. Additionally, the agreement to return to work with a no-strike pledge was proposed by the union, not the company, with the significant omission from the union’s initial proposal for the company to procure the requested data that was cited by the union as a major factor in calling the strike.

The agreement also dropped the demand to end the company’s lawsuit against the union alleging conspiracy to commit multi-union bargaining.

Workers expressed exasperation with the union’s decision to call off the strike.

Responding to the announcement on Facebook, one worker wrote, “you work for us! You should have had us vote! You are no one without us. So why would you make decisions without us?”

Another asked, “What was the whole point in calling off the strike when [King Soopers’ parent company] Kroger was [feeling] the pressure, that question is not being answered by you the union answer [sic] the question why did you call [off] the strike?”

Another added, “How ridiculous. So we went on strike for a better contract and now it’s ending with no contract and their offer pulled from the table? What a joke.”

Responding to the news on Reddit, one striking worker said, “What a waste of time freezing our asses off just because the two can’t figure it out. What’s messed up is that the nonunion stores employees already got their $1.50 raises while we come back working with our regular pay for nothing!”

Another added, “Should have stayed on strike. Make the company FEEL THE POWER OF THE PEOPLE. Executives and stockholder ain’t coming to stock the

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shelves, make sandwiches, cut meat or bag groceries. The PEOPLE are most important and the company is turning profits in the hundreds of millions, taking home millions in bonuses, while the people live on scraps and with raising inflation, barely survive. No discount for working there? Not child care support? One of the largest companies in the world and if we died, they wouldn't even send flowers."

Cancellation of the strike without any input from the membership is a massive sellout of the powerful strike by King Soopers workers. For the second time in three years, roughly 10,000 Colorado workers courageously took on one of the largest corporations in the United States, picketing in freezing weather under the threat of losing their health insurance.

After having their contract negotiations drawn out, working without a contract for weeks, the week-and-a-half strike was called off without a vote on an agreement that will see them continue to work without a contract for three more months.

The union has dressed up this decision as some master move to maneuver the contract negotiations to align with other UFCW contracts in other states that will expire in the coming months.

A unified struggle of Kroger workers is necessary, but can workers place their faith in a union bureaucracy that did not even call out workers in Colorado Springs when their contract expired on February 15 and that extended the contract at Safeway indefinitely to avoid a unified struggle of workers at the two largest grocery chains in the country?

Allusions to a multi-state movement ring hollow when the union refuses to communicate these maneuvers to the membership. Such talk from the UFCW is grandstanding to portray a militant face while colluding with management to enforce a sellout contract in the background. These maneuvers are reminiscent of the strike by Amazon drivers before Christmas, during which the Teamsters spouted militant rhetoric but called off the strike without meeting any of the workers' demands, including recognition of the union by the company.

The experience of this strike, and the sellout of the strike three years ago, demonstrates that the struggle of King Soopers workers and grocery workers more broadly cannot be left in the hands of the UFCW bureaucracy. Bureaucrats like Kim Cordova, who makes more than $200,000 a year, are more committed to labor peace than to fighting for what workers deserve. The response of King Soopers management says it all, referring to the agreement as a "100-day period of labor peace" without "further disruptions."

Instead, rank-and-file workers must take matters into their own hands. They must build rank-and-file committees, controlled by rank-and-file workers independently of union bureaucrats, that will form networks of communication and organization between King Soopers stores, as well as connect with Kroger workers in other states and with their fellow grocery workers at other companies like Safeway.

These committees will organize opposition to any attempt to ram through a sellout contract that fails to meet workers needs and prepare for any resumption of strike action based on the demands of the rank-and-file.

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