

Tens of thousands of grocery workers to vote on strike in Southern California

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Over 30,000 grocery workers across Southern California at the Ralphs, Albertsons, Vons and Pavilions chains are set to vote on strike action between June 8 and 11, the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) announced last Wednesday. Ralphs is owned by national grocery chain Kroger, while Vons and Pavilions are owned by Albertsons.

Elsewhere in the country, 30 drivers at a Kroger hub in Atlanta, Georgia authorized strike action last week.

This vote follows the expiration of their contract in March 2025 and months of stalled negotiations. Workers are demanding living wages, relief from an all-encompassing staffing crisis, affordable healthcare, secure pensions and humane scheduling.

The response of grocery store management is a provocation, including no raises for most workers and a meager \$2.50 increase to the top of the pay scale over three years—an offer that doesn't begin to keep pace with inflation or the skyrocketing cost of living in California. For workers already living on the edge—many of them immigrants—this is a sentence to continued hardship.

Southern California grocery workers are fighting not only corporate exploitation but also the rightward drive by the entire political establishment. The Trump administration's fascistic policies of war and oligarchic plundering are a huge threat to the future of millions of workers in the US and on the whole planet. Immigrant workers, who form the backbone of the grocery store workforce, face increasing state repression from deportations and ICE raids.

The Trump administration's assault on jobs and democratic rights, its efforts to dismantle basic rights and jobs for over a million federal workers, its attacks on agencies like the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, and its demonization of immigrants have met

with only perfunctory statements from the UFCW and officials from other unions. They are refusing to mobilize their members in a direct clash with the would-be dictator Trump. Some, such as the United Auto Workers, the Teamsters and the ILWU and ILA dockworkers unions, have openly embraced elements of Trump's "America First" trade policies.

Having been forced to call a strike vote, the UFCW will do everything it can to either prevent a strike or limit it as much as possible. Workers must learn the lessons in particular of the the 2003–2004 Southern California supermarket strike and lockout, which involved 59,000 workers and was one of the largest strikes in decades. After five grueling months, the union imposed a contract with a two-tier wage structure, which it falsely described as a "victory."

The pattern was repeated in 2011, when the union defied a strike mandate to push a contract which preserved two-tier wages and saddled workers with rising healthcare costs. Nationwide, the UFCW fragments workers by negotiating separately with each chain and in each state, playing directly into employers' hands.

In California, the UFCW's decision to put to a vote an Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) strike, a legal category which limits workers from raising economic demands, is designed to limit the scope of the struggle in advance. Meanwhile, it is seeking to divert attention to the much-hyped "Grocery Workers Rising" campaign and public relations stunt. The UFCW's ULP charges—unlawful surveillance, interrogations, retaliation, banning union buttons—are genuine, but the bureaucracy has no strategy to oppose them. It has explicitly told workers that a strike authorization "does not mean you will automatically go on strike."

To prepare for a genuine struggle, workers must

organize rank-and-file strike committees to enforce the democratic decision to strike, a result which is all but guaranteed in the upcoming vote, and to enforce rank-and-file control over the conduct of the strike.

Workers must be on guard in particular against any last minute snap contract votes used either to block a strike or rapidly shut it down, and be prepared to take measures to countermand such betrayals.

Rank-and-file committees should also serve as defense organizations against ICE raids and other attacks on immigrant workers. The UFCW bureaucracy is attempting to limit opposition to including “know your rights” training into new contracts, which will do nothing to stop Trump’s lawless rampage.

The Socialist Equality Party, which is campaigning for workplace and neighborhood defense committees, explained in a statement that, “Wherever they function, committees will strive to break down all efforts by the two big business parties and the trade union bureaucracies to divide workers along immigration status or national background. They will expose the xenophobic lies of the corporate media by waging a campaign of mass political education aimed at rendering the population ‘wide awake’ to the threat against democracy.”

Critically, grocery workers must link up with other sections of the working class, both “immigrant” and “native-born,” in other industries, to build up a broader movement to confront the fascistic policies of the Trump administration. Such a movement must be completely independent of the Democratic Party, which is caving to Trump’s every demand because it is more afraid of a movement from below which threatens capitalist property relations.

For more information about rank-and-file committees, contact the *World Socialist Web Site*.



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