

Safeway grocery workers walk out in Colorado, while tens of thousands nationwide push for strike action

Alex Findijs
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Organize for an all-out strike by Kroger and Albertsons workers! Fill out the form below for help building a rank-and-file committee.

Workers at Albertsons-owned grocery chain Safeway in Colorado walked off the job Saturday morning, in the second grocery worker strike in the state this year. Pickets were set up at stores in Estes Park, Fountain, Pueblo and a distribution center in Denver.

Safeway workers had authorized strike action at all stores across the state by 99 percent, but the union announced that it would begin with only the four locations, claiming that the strike could expand in the coming days. Employees at stores in Colorado Springs, Fort Collins, Greeley, Loveland and Longmont will vote Monday and Tuesday to authorize strike action as well.

The strike comes after nine months of negotiations which has not yet produced an agreement. Safeway's previous contract, with the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 7R, expired in January, but the union opted to extend it with continued negotiations, a move which isolated a two-week strike by 10,000 King Soopers workers in February.

This time it is Safeway workers on strike, while the union officials force King Soopers workers to wait on the sidelines. The strike in February ended without a contract, with the UFCW instead agreeing to a 100-day truce to restart negotiations. That 100-day period expired at the end of May and then was extended further by the union and management, leaving King Soopers workers without a contract for six months.

Grocery workers across the US are under contracts which have expired or are set to expire:

- Around 30,000 Kroger and Albertsons workers in Seattle authorized strike action earlier this month.

In Indiana, Kroger workers overwhelmingly rejected a new contract last week; three years ago, workers voted down repeated UFCW sellouts and formed a rank-and-file

committee to fight the sabotage by union officials.

- 45,000 grocery workers in Southern California are preparing for strike action against grocery chains owned by Albertsons and Kroger.

And thousands of grocery workers in New Mexico, whose contracts expired June 14, are also prepared to vote for strike action.

All of these workers are members of the UFCW, but the union bureaucracy is doing everything it can to keep these struggles isolated from each other.

It is urgent that grocery workers break through this isolation and establish a powerful united struggle across the country. They must not wait for permission from union bureaucrats who are deliberately breaking their unity. They must take the initiative themselves by forming joint rank-and-file committees, excluding union officials, which are capable of enforcing the clear decision made by the majority for all-out strike action.

A nationwide strike movement of grocery workers must become part of a general strike against the Trump administration's expanding attacks on immigrants and attempts to set up a military dictatorship. Immigration raids are targeting the working class, particularly up and down food supply chains, where foreign-born workers are heavily represented.

Workers pushing for joint action

Grocery workers across the US are heavily exploited. At Safeway in Denver, the starting pay for a clerk was negotiated to just \$17 an hour in the last contract, \$1.81 less than Denver's current minimum wage. Top pay for clerks is only \$22.61, with the last negotiated pay increase occurring in January 2024.

These are poverty wages. According to the MIT Living Wage Calculator, a single person in Denver needs to earn \$26.20 to make a living wage. For a family of four with both parents working, each would need to make \$35.21 an hour to make a living wage.

Both King Soopers and Safeway in Colorado are aiming for concessions to employee healthcare, meanwhile, workers are reporting that their stores are severely understaffed, resulting in workers doing the jobs of multiple people. This was a central issue in the King Soopers strike in February, but the union claimed it needed staffing data from management to make demands for proper staffing levels.

With nothing resolved and no end in sight to negotiations, King Soopers workers are rearing to get back in the fight, especially now that Safeway workers are on strike. Responding to the union's updates and announcements, workers have offered an outpouring of support for strike action and solidarity with their fellow workers at Safeway.

"I say that if we are all in this together all contributing to one plan then Kings employees should join Safeway employees on their picket line," one worker said. "If we are one Union, one voice. Let's prove it!"

"Why are you all still talking?" asked another. "Let's go on strike already! Why did we even go back after the first strike?? This would be all done by now if we would have stayed out of the stores!! Money talks. Let's walk!!!"

In both the most recent King Soopers strike and during the strike in 2022, the UFCW purposefully avoided a joint struggle of King Soopers and Safeway workers, even though their contracts expired at nearly the same time. The excuse they used was to avoid restricting community access to groceries, with UFCW 7 President Kim Cordova telling 9News that, "I want to make sure consumers have a place to shop."

This strikebreaking statement flew in the face of the overwhelming public support which the strike received, as working class Coloradoans boycotted King Soopers stores which remained open. Eventually the UFCW shut down the strike at precisely the point where the strike was having its greatest impact, with grocery store shelves thinning and community support spreading.

But workers demanding a common struggle to win their demands, leveraging their combined strength to force concessions from the companies instead of ceding the initiative to management and allowing them to recoup losses from redirected sales during a strike.

"I'm all for Albertsons and Safeway striking," said one worker, "but it's also our turn as well. It's time King Soopers and City Market goes back on the line as well! Why can't we all strike at the same time? I'm tired of waiting. This is why half of us are dropping out of the union because

everything keeps getting postponed. At the rate this is going it's gonna be a whole year before we get a contract. And the big wigs don't care as long as they are getting their money. King Soopers and City Market want to strike now!"

The response of the union bureaucracy has been to dismiss criticism and deflect demands for action. A constant refrain from the UFCW during the past two King Soopers strikes has been to deflect responsibility for involving and informing the membership onto the rank and file itself.

Union officials repeat the tired old phrase of "you should have gone to a bargaining session," with little regard for the fact that workers often do not have the time, or even the money, to travel up to several hours for a multi-hour bargaining session just to get an inkling of what is happening in negotiations over which they have no control.

The union bureaucracy's actions and its history indicate it will try to sell out the Safeway and King Soopers once again. When it shut down the 2022 strike, the UFCW did not give workers a chance to see the contract, which failed to meet workers demands, until the day of voting. This year the union called off strike action at King Soopers without any input from the rank and file, and never even raised its own demands.

The union bureaucracy has done everything in its power to frustrate, delay and sabotage the struggles of grocery workers in Colorado.

A new, alternative leadership must be built, composed of grocery workers themselves and not career officials. The rank and file of Safeway and King Soopers must organize together independently of the union bureaucracy through the formation of rank-and-file committees. They must build their own leaderships in every city and store and establish lines of communication between companies and to other sections of workers.

Their demands must include: Substantial pay raises to enable workers to live decent lives, adequate staffing levels determined by the rank and file, and fully-funded high-quality health coverage and expanded benefits.



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