

# 45,000 Southern California grocery workers vote to strike, as UFCW bureaucracy moves to block it

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Tens of thousands of Southern California grocery workers employed by Kroger-owned Ralphs and Albertsons and Albertsons-owned chains Vons and Pavilions voted by 90 percent to authorize a strike, in a massive show of militancy between June 8 and June 11. These 45,000 workers, organized under the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) union, have been laboring without a contract since March 2, 2025.

Yet despite this powerful show of strength, the UFCW bureaucracy is doing everything in its power to smother and derail this movement, reduce it to toothless theatrics, and ultimately betray it in the service of the grocery conglomerates and the capitalist system they defend. This underscores the need for a fight by workers to assert control over their struggle, countering any violation of the democratic will of the workers themselves through rank-and-file committees.

The UFCW leadership has deliberately channeled the strike vote into an *Unfair Labor Practice* (ULP) framework, a legalistic cul-de-sac meant to prevent workers from raising economic demands.

For an entire week, from June 16 to June 20, the union staged “practice ULP strikes,” involving picket signs, chants, and Instagram-friendly rallies, with one final performance scheduled for June 27—the same day as the next bargaining session. These “strike drills” are not preparation for struggle; they are meant to provide cover for a sellout.

In 2023, the Teamsters bureaucrats used “practice pickets” to present a new contract at UPS as the product of a “credible strike threat.” But within weeks after the contract was ratified, tens of thousands of workers began losing their jobs.

The grocery chains, for their part, have offered a contemptuous wage increase of \$2.75 spread over three years—less than a dollar per year. The union, far from rejecting this insult outright, has made clear that it is open to settling around that number. “We deserve more than \$2.50 over three years,” they proclaim, transparently signaling that anything slightly above that figure could be declared a victory. Even an \$8 raise over three years would be a slap in the face, condemning tens of thousands to poverty in one of the most expensive regions in the country.

Among workers, however, there is strong support for a broader struggle. Dennis, a grocery worker in Los Angeles, bluntly told the WSWS: “I’m all for a general strike against Trump. I think it’s absolutely horrific what’s happening to immigrant workers and the fact that we can’t make a decent living.”

Kara, a veteran with 24 years on the job, told the WSWS about the so-called “convenience” of self-checkout: “Older customers get confused, and we have to drop everything to fix the problem.” Now, workers are unpaid tech support, juggling bagging, stocking, cleaning, and calming furious shoppers. “People yell at us like it’s our fault,” Kara says, “while the company acts like we should be thankful to have a job.” After decades, Kara warns, “It’s worse than ever. They squeeze us harder, and all we get is peanuts.”

The union bureaucracy is playing its assigned role in the corporate and state machinery: to suppress working-class struggle, fragment workers by region and industry, and make sure the class war is waged only by one side.

While organizing “practice” pickets, the UFCW is trying to scare workers away from a real strike for

inflation-busting wages and other gains. On the UFCW Local 324 website, the union warns: “Striking to protest unfair labor practices (unlike an economic strike) means that workers cannot be permanently replaced. In addition, workers can return to work without a contract being approved.” This legal advice is a blunt threat. The bureaucracy is telling workers: *If you demand a real strike, we won’t support you.*

But the truth is, the workers are more than ready to fight. And they are not alone. Across the country, grocery workers are rising up. In Colorado, Safeway and Albertsons workers with UFCW Local 7 launched a strike on June 15. Their demands are similar: relief from crushing understaffing, protection of health benefits, and pay that keeps up with living costs. But even here, the UFCW has limited the strike to a handful of locations, while keeping thousands of King Soopers grocery workers on the job without a contract after it shut down a strike earlier this year.

In Indiana, Kroger workers have repeatedly rejected contract sellouts over the past three years and even formed a rank-and-file committee to fight the sabotage by UFCW officials. Thousands of workers in New Mexico—whose contracts expired June 14—are also poised for strike action. In Washington State and elsewhere, workers face the same miserable pay offers, unbearable conditions, and treachery from their so-called representatives.

There is enormous potential for a united movement of Kroger and Albertsons workers across the country. But activating this potential requires workers take the initiative into their own hands. They must connect their struggles with the broader mass movement against dictatorship, war and oligarchy shown by last week’s mass protests against the Trump administration, which has now launched a catastrophic new war with Iran which will be paid for by working people.

Trump is escalating his fascistic attacks on immigrant workers—many of whom stock the shelves, bag groceries, and clean the floors in these stores. While grocery locations have not yet been targeted, raids have already struck Home Depot and Lowe’s.

Grocery workers have power. They are a critical link in the supply chain, essential to daily life. But to use this power requires a fight for the independence of the working class against pro-corporate union officials and the two capitalist parties.



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