

UFCW sabotages Colorado grocery workers by shutting down Safeway strike, announcing deal at King Soopers

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On Thursday, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 7 (UFCW 7) announced a tentative agreement with King Soopers grocery chain in Colorado, then on Saturday announced a deal to end a three-week strike at rival chain Safeway.

This is the latest in a sabotage campaign by the UFCW aimed at preventing a national strike movement by grocery workers. Around 100,000 grocery workers, all of them UFCW members, have contracts that have expired or are expiring this summer.

Last week, the UFCW announced a tentative agreement for 45,000 Southern California grocery store workers after violating its own strike deadline as well as a 90 percent strike authorization vote by the membership.

In February, 10,000 King Soopers workers struck for 12 days in Colorado, but the UFCW sent them back to work with a 100-day "labor peace" agreement. This "agreement," which workers did not agree to, expired at the end of May, but the union still kept workers on the job throughout June and into July.

At King Soopers, the highlights of the deals claim fully-funded pensions and health benefits and "Strong wage increases for top rates, grandfathered employees and department managers" but do not provide any details as to what these actually are.

Notably, the "highlights" claim unspecified wage increases only for those at the top rate and for department managers. It also says nothing about whether the contract will fix understaffing problems plaguing King Soopers stores, a central issue for grocery workers. Instead, the agreement simply mentions a "new test-and-learn trial to study real and meaningful staffing improvements in the

stores."

In other words, the company will conduct a study to determine if they need to hire new people at their stores, from which they will undoubtedly conclude that things are working just fine.

The deal at Safeway was announced with similar highlights, with the difference of referring to "strong wage increases"—still unspecified—or all employees instead of just "top rate," and references to restoring attendance points and "expanded vacation cash-out."

Both announcements say that "full details of the agreement will be available at ratification vote meetings" which are being organized over the next several days. This can only mean the contracts are miserable sellouts and that the UFCW is keeping the details secret and denying workers the right to adequately study the contract in a bid to pull a fast one over them.

This is exactly what UFCW 7 did when it ended the 10-day King Soopers strike in 2022. Workers were not allowed to study the contract and were required to travel to a hotel to vote. That deal, hidden from workers until the last minute, broke the momentum of the strike and failed to meet what the union had claimed it was fighting for. Ratification meetings were held at locations far from where many workers lived, resulting in a lower turnout.

Noting this, one worker responded to the announcement by saying "Shouldn't the members see the actual contract and vote before you pull the picket lines?"

Another King Soopers worker remarked: "'Strong wage increase' okay. Keeping us in the dark as always. Nothing about fixing the understaffing problems. This agreement took over 150 days? What a joke. You guys stretched this as long as you can just so we can vote yes to anything at this point. You guys got what you wanted so I guess we're done 'fighting' now."

This is exactly the strategy of the pro-corporate union bureaucracy. It seeks to isolate workers, push through contracts on management's terms and prevent a broader struggle of the working class.

The Safeway strike was a powerful display of working class resistance to exploitation. It was the third grocery workers strike in Colorado in the past three years and the first strike at Safeway since 1998. Yet the UFCW bureaucracy did its best to hold workers back and sabotage their struggle.

The strike began on June 15 with just four stores and a distribution center in Denver. By the time the strike ended, it had expanded to only 43 stores out of the 51 stores which are under UFCW contracts in the state.

The UFCW claimed the slow roll out of pickets was meant to "allow time for the public to understand the problems these workers are facing, allow Safeway/Albertsons time to understand the seriousness of the workers' resolve, and at the same time reduce the hardship on shoppers and workers alike that result from a wide-spread strike."

None of this is true. Public support for striking workers is immense, building on extensive public support during the last two King Soopers strikes. And if the union wanted to demonstrate its "seriousness" it would have called out all stores at once instead of dragging their feet at every step and allowing the company to continue operations. The "hardship" that the union bureaucracy is actually trying to reduce is that on the company and the union's coffers paid out as strike pay.

In truth, the union's strategy is following the playbook of United Auto Workers president Shawn Fain's phony "stand up strike" of 2023, in which only a few locations were called to strike at a time and the most profitable facilities were kept on the job to weaken the strike, demoralize the membership and pave the way for a sellout agreement that has enabled the destruction of thousands of jobs.

UFCW 7 had begrudgingly called strike action under immense pressure from the membership, but only after extending their contract with Safeway for months to avoid a joint struggle with King Soopers workers who struck for two weeks in February.

The UFCW has done everything in its power to prevent a joint struggle over the past three years. Safeway workers were kept on the job while King Soopers struck in 2022 and then again this February. In each instance their contracts were extended without a vote by the membership to prevent a joint strike. Faced with a

strengthening Safeway strike, which the union called only because it could not hold back the rank and file forever, the UFCW is seeking to push through agreements before they lose control of the situation.

Workers should reject the contracts on principle. Both sets of workers have waited far too long, especially after having their strikes unilaterally called off by the union bureaucracy, to not have every demand met.

The bureaucrats have demonstrated that they are on the other side. In response, workers must build rank-and-file committees in every store to transfer power from unaccountable officials back to the workers where it belongs. These committees should organize the strongest possible "no" vote and prepare a joint strike at both chains.

Such a movement must link up with the tens of thousands of grocery store workers across the US fighting against both management and sellout bureaucrats. A particular appeal must also be made to workers in other industries, including municipal workers from Philadelphia fighting massive cuts—where 9,000 workers are currently on strike—to Los Angeles.

The fight to defend wages and living standards must link up with the mass political movement against dictatorship and war, shown by the millions who took to the streets last month against Trump and his Democratic Party enablers.

The union bureaucracy is not only incapable of waging a struggle against these conditions, it is actively opposed to them. Only through the building of a rank-and-file movement to take control out of the hands of the bureaucracy and return power to the membership can a genuine fight be waged.



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