

Southern California UFCW forces sellout deal on grocery workers through sham vote

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Grocery workers: tell us what you think about this new contract! Fill out the form below; all submissions will be kept anonymous.

On Friday, July 11, the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) concluded a sham ratification vote on a sellout contract covering 45,000 Ralphs, Albertsons, Vons and Pavilions grocery workers who had voted overwhelmingly for a strike in Southern California. One local announced ratification votes between 81 and 85 percent in favor (San Diego), but the union released no further details, including the total number of ballots cast.

This vote—lacking transparency, oversight and genuine worker participation—was used to prevent a strike and ram through an agreement that enshrines poverty wages, opens the door to job cuts through automation, and offers meager “benefits” that do nothing to offset the rising cost of living in one of the most expensive regions in the country.

Everything about the ratification process reeks of fraud, suppression and manipulation. From the moment the UFCW bureaucracy announced a tentative agreement on July 2, it worked systematically to prevent workers from understanding, discussing or opposing the deal. For nearly a week, the union refused to release any details. In the interim, workers were left in the dark, forced to rely on rumors, speculation and vague promises from union reps.

It was not until several days after the announcement that a partial “ratification handout” was quietly posted on some local union websites. This document, riddled with omissions and carefully worded to obscure the truth, revealed that the wage “increases” amounted to a mere trickle of change, with most workers seeing only a dollar per year, if that. No full contract was made available for review.

Briahna, a worker who posted on Local 324’s Facebook page, spoke for many when she wrote, “What part of this contract do you guys think is a good deal—a dollar a year? We are still not being paid what we are worth! I was told by our union rep at our store what they agreed to and it’s not a good deal in the slightest!”

Workers were given no opportunity for independent, collective review or deliberation. Instead, the UFCW bureaucracy held just two tightly controlled Zoom “information sessions” on Monday and Tuesday. These were supervised events, where the union machinery worked overtime to promote a “yes” vote.

“When you’re there they’re gonna push you to vote yes, they’re gonna make you think that is the best contract ever,” one worker predicted before the meetings. “When they try to explain the things that you have questions about they try to throw something else that sounds good. Trust me on that one.”

Then, with only two days of controlled discussion, the union launched a rushed vote beginning Wednesday, July 9, and concluding Friday, July 11. A large part of the voting was conducted online, via a “secure” ballot sent by text or email. In addition, some locals voted in-person starting on Monday.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has documented widespread issues with such systems in union ratifications across the country with Teamsters, CFA or IBEW: ballots not being received, voting links expiring or misdirected, workers being left out of the process entirely.

Jason, a worker, wrote: “Never got notice to go vote.” Without any independent oversight, without any worker supervision or public ballot counting, these “elections” are not democratic processes, just tools of manipulation designed to produce a predetermined outcome.

As Michael, another worker, warned: “Just remember everyone was excited for \$4.25 (and rightfully so, it was the largest wage increase we had seen in years). Well, at the end of those 3 years, \$4.25 did not keep up with the rising costs from 2022 to 2025. Anything less than \$4 will be a no this time around.”

Adrienne, another worker, summarized the situation: “This was a complete joke.”

The UFCW apparatus, which pockets millions in dues from these workers each year, served as the enforcer for Kroger and Albertsons, suppressing any opposition and pushing through a deal that no serious worker would have accepted had they been given the chance to fight.

Bryon, in a telling post, asked, “Why not post the agreement on the website so that we can look it over and have our questions ready for the webinar after looking it over thoroughly?” This simple demand for transparency was not permitted.

The UFCW is terrified not of the corporations but of the workers. A strike of 45,000 Southern California grocery workers would have sent shockwaves through the industry. It would have inspired retail and food service workers across the country. It would have opened the floodgates for a broader offensive by the working class.

This betrayal is not an isolated event. In recent days alone, the UFCW bureaucracy sabotaged the Safeway strike in Colorado and announced a separate deal at King Soopers. In Indianapolis, Kroger workers are demanding strike action after rejecting a similar sellout agreement from the union. Instead of uniting these struggles and calling for a nationwide strike to demand real raises, safe staffing and protection against automation, the UFCW is working overtime to isolate, divide and demoralize its members.

This is especially outrageous given the scale of the crisis facing the working class, spearheaded by the Trump administration’s reactionary “Big Beautiful Bill” but carried out by Democrats at the local level in major cities across the US. Los Angeles recently declared a “fiscal emergency” and laid off hundreds of city workers as a down payment to close a \$1 billion shortfall; the recent strike by Philadelphia city workers took place amid “doomsday” budgeting for the city’s transit system and deep cuts to education.

These cuts will hit every section of the working class. Grocery workers will see their healthcare costs soar.

Immigrant workers will be targeted by raids and deportations. Food insecurity and poverty will skyrocket. All while corporations like Kroger post record profits.

The UFCW bureaucracy functions as an arm of corporate management, preventing struggle, enforcing concessions and selling illusions of progress while workers are driven into deeper poverty. The union’s entire existence is predicated on its ability to police the rank and file on behalf of the companies.

This is why workers must draw the necessary conclusions. No amount of pressure or appeals can reform this apparatus. The UFCW leadership is not an ally but an obstacle to be overcome. The fight must be taken into the hands of the workers themselves.

The working class cannot afford to continue placing its fate in the hands of unaccountable bureaucrats that function as agents of capital. The betrayal of the UFCW must be the starting point for a new strategy based on the unity of the working class and rejection of management’s “right” to a profit.



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