

UFCW blocks Northern California Safeway strike with sellout deal

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In the early hours of Sunday, July 27, the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) announced a tentative agreement (TA) with Safeway, a subsidiary of Albertsons, aimed at blocking a strike by 25,000 grocery workers in UFCW Locals 5, 648 and 8-Golden State in Northern California.

The strike, scheduled to begin the same day, would have marked the first regional walkout against Safeway in nearly 30 years. The previous contract expired April 12 after more than five months of fruitless “negotiations” that the union deliberately prolonged to prevent any genuine mobilization.

Workers at Safeway, like their brothers and sisters at other chains, are demanding substantial wage increases, expanded healthcare coverage, secure scheduling and stronger job protections. They face soaring rents, food prices and utility costs in one of the most expensive regions of the country, while corporate profits hit record highs. (Safeway’s 2024 adjusted net income was \$1.38 billion.)

The UFCW spent five months meeting in secret with Safeway executives. When the deadline arrived, the UFCW announced a last-minute TA and canceled the strike.

As always, the union presented the deal as a “victory,” claiming it includes “meaningful wage increases,” a “fortified retirement plan,” “properly funded health care,” “strong job protections” and “fair scheduling.” With no evidence.

The union has refused to release any specific details on wages or any other contract language. The union says the full details will be released only after ratification. In other words, workers are being told to vote on a contract they are not allowed to see.

Local 5 President John Frahm and Local 648 President Dan Larson issued statements praising the

contract as a “hard-earned and inspiring victory” and attributing it to workers’ “unity” and “community support.” They claim this agreement “reflects workers’ value” and “delivers real improvements.”

But if the deal truly reflected the needs of workers, details would be released immediately. Instead, votes are being scheduled in secret, with no access to the contract language, no rank-and-file discussion and no opportunity to organize opposition.

This summer, more than 100,000 grocery store workers in the UFCW have or have had contracts expire around the US. But in each case, the UFCW bureaucracy has stepped in to isolate workers and force through deals that benefit the corporations.

The announcement of the Northern California TA came just weeks after the UFCW rammed through a rotten deal in Southern California, covering 60,000 workers. There, the union staged a “strike authorization” vote, held token rallies and announced a TA with virtually no public disclosure of contract details. Most workers never saw the agreement before being rushed into a sham ratification vote.

The same pattern played out in Colorado, where Safeway and King Soopers workers launched limited strikes earlier this year. In every case, the UFCW’s priority was to isolate the struggles, shut down picket lines and impose deals favorable to the corporations.

The UFCW’s campaign of nationwide sellouts continues. Around 12,000 UFCW Local 135 workers at Stater Bros. stores in San Diego have voted to authorize a strike that the union is limiting to unfair labor practices (ULP). Yet the union has made clear it does not intend to call a strike. Instead, it is continuing closed-door talks with management scheduled for July 30–31.

Many Safeway workers are immigrants, now facing

intensifying threats under the Trump administration's stepped-up deportation campaigns. In recent weeks, workers have reported incidents inside stores—provocations orchestrated by management to create fear and disrupt organizing. The UFCW has remained silent, refusing to defend its own members from harassment and intimidation.

The first step forward is for workers to reject the tentative agreement outright. It was concocted in secrecy with Safeway management and continues to be kept hidden. The union is deliberately preventing meaningful discussion and railroading members into approving a deal they have not seen. Workers must demand the immediate release of the full contract and organize to vote it down.

To prevent another betrayal, workers must take the process into their own hands. This requires building independent, democratically elected rank-and-file committees in every store and warehouse. These committees must exclude the UFCW bureaucrats and establish genuine control by the workers themselves over their struggle.

But this is not just a fight over wages or scheduling. It is a political fight against an entire system built on war and the exploitation of labor for corporate profit. The corporations, the unions and both political parties are united in defending capitalism, which demands lower wages, mass layoffs and the destruction of basic rights.

This struggle is part of a broader confrontation between the working class and the capitalist ruling elite. The Trump administration is imposing fascistic measures—deportations, attacks on democratic rights and brutal social cuts—while California's Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom has enacted a 2025–26 budget slashing vital social programs under austerity dictates.

In this fight, the chief obstacle is the union bureaucracy. Earlier this month, union officials in AFSCME shut down an eight-day strike of Philadelphia city workers and imposed a sellout deal almost identical to the city's initial offer.

That is why workers must break through the isolation and link up across industries and across the country. A nationwide counteroffensive is urgently needed. The planning and execution of a general strike—uniting grocery, sanitation, logistics, public sector and all sections of the working class—is the necessary next step.

It is the only way to place power in the hands of workers and win the demands that their lives and futures depend on.



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