

Vote No on the UFCW's sellout tentative agreement with Safeway in northern California!

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On July 27, the UFCW released a two-page “highlights” leaflet for the tentative agreement covering 25,000 Safeway grocery workers in Locals 5, 648 and 8-Golden State. The summary is filled with claims of “victory” and “recommendation.”

Not a single worker has been provided with the full text of the tentative agreement. The union itself admits that “full details of the agreement will be released following ratification.” This is aimed at preventing workers from scrutinizing the deal before they vote on it.

The contract trumpets a “\$3.60 wage increase over three years for experienced employees,” front-loaded with a \$1.00 increase retroactive to April 2025. In reality, this amounts to barely \$1.20 per year, ensuring that real wages will continue to stagnate. For most workers in “step progressions,” the effective pay raise will be even smaller, delayed, or offset by cuts in hours, especially in the Home Shopper and Fuel Station classifications.

By structuring raises in small increments—\$1.00 in 2026, \$1.00 in 2027, and a miserable \$0.60 in late 2027—the union is guaranteeing Safeway a predictable, manageable labor cost, while workers continue to struggle with skyrocketing housing, food, and fuel prices in California.

The so-called “premium pay” increases for select classifications are equally insulting, at just \$0.25 an hour in 2025 and another \$0.25 in 2026, the cost of a single banana. This paltry sum is meant to sow divisions between workers, offering token incentives to a few while leaving the majority behind.

Current base wages at Safeway are already far below what is required to live in Northern California: approximately \$17.89 per hour for entry-level clerks, \$19 for night crew stockers, \$20.20 for cashiers and \$22.82 for meat cutters. Meanwhile, Safeway has advertised for temporary workers at \$27.73 an hour. These positions,

allowed under union rules, can be used to undermine any job action.

The touted “\$0.40 additional contribution” to healthcare is not a gain for workers but a pass-through to keep the current plan afloat amid rising costs. Safeway continues to shift the burden onto workers through stagnant wages and restrictive eligibility. The increase in sick leave payout to \$600 applies only to those who never take sick days, effectively discouraging workers from using the benefit.

Pension provisions are “maintained” at their current, inadequate levels. The much-promoted “Lifetime Income Security Account” will provide only about \$35 in additional annual accrual for a full-time worker. The \$15 million contribution the company made in 2024 was not a new concession to workers, but a legally required payment long overdue.

The section on “electronic checkout” formalizes Safeway’s expansion of self-checkout, which has long been used to cut labor costs. The agreement offers only token guarantees of one staffed lane during daytime hours, while expanding “incidental work” for the single self-checkout monitor, increasing workload and stress.

The “Safety Committee” proposal consists of management-controlled meetings capped at two hours a month, with no binding authority to enforce safe conditions. This is wholly inadequate for a workforce confronting understaffing, ergonomic injuries and in-store violence.

The agreement runs through April 2028, tying workers’ hands for three years as the company accelerates automation, reduces hours and deepens exploitation. By recommending the deal unanimously, the UFCW bureaucracy has once again demonstrated its role as a partner in corporate cost-cutting.

The UFCW has used the same methods in recent

struggles. Just last month, it pushed through a sellout deal for Southern California grocery workers under similar conditions: secrecy, the withholding of the full agreement until after the vote and the isolation of workers from each other. In Colorado, limited strikes by Safeway and King Soopers workers earlier this year were wound down by the UFCW in order to impose corporate-friendly terms.

On August 6, the UFCW announced another tentative deal for 12,000 Stater Bros. workers in San Diego who had already voted to strike. The union first restricted the strike to narrow “unfair labor practice” charges, then shut it down entirely through a closed-door settlement.

Workers speak out

Anger is growing. A WSWs contact expressed his frustration with the union: “I do agree with a no vote but my problem is with the union,” he said. “I get that Safeway is going to offer an unfair contract but for the union to support it? That’s why I’m angry! It might not make sense, but I’m really not upset with Safeway, I’m furious over the union and how they are ‘fighting’ for us.”

On social media, workers have described the “highlights” leaflet as “insulting” and “a slap in the face.” One worker wrote: “They came to an agreement with Albertsons/Safeway/Kroger and never told us any info until the day of the vote and we never got the results on the contract vote.”

Another commented: “It’s absolutely disgusting that the organization that is supposed to be representing us is hiding the details of the contract. We need a union to protect us from our union. Dues keep going up and what are we getting from them?”

A former worker recalled: “I was part of UFCW for 20 years while working for Vons and Albertsons. They worked with Albertsons during the Haggen buyout to send higher-paid union members to stores they knew would fail, just to get rid of older contracts.”

Northern California is one of the most expensive regions in the United States. Rents, food prices and transportation costs are at record highs. California’s latest budget includes sweeping cuts to social programs, especially for immigrants.

Many Safeway workers are immigrants, now facing intensified raids by Immigration and Customs

Enforcement under the Trump administration, even in hospitals and grocery stores. The tentative agreement contains no provisions to defend these workers from such attacks.

The UFCW’s conduct reflects the bureaucracy’s class position as a privileged layer of officials whose incomes and careers are tied to their role in enforcing corporate demands. By controlling and limiting struggles, they ensure that the wealth produced by workers flows upward to the executives and shareholders of Albertsons and other corporations.

A way forward: rank-and-file committees

Safeway workers should vote NO on the tentative agreement. But that is only the first step. Preparations for a general strike must be launched immediately. To wage an effective fight, workers must take the struggle into their own hands by forming rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by workers themselves and independent of the UFCW bureaucracy.

Such committees should demand the immediate release of the full tentative agreement, mass meetings to discuss its contents, and sufficient time for workers to study and debate its terms before any vote. They should fight for demands based on workers’ needs, not corporate “affordability”: substantial wage increases to match inflation and the cost of living, fully employer-paid healthcare and secure full-time jobs.

These committees must also link up with other sections of workers facing the same attacks, including those in Southern California, Colorado and beyond, to prepare a unified struggle. The fight for decent wages and conditions is inseparable from a political struggle against the corporations, their political allies in both parties and the pro-company union apparatus.

A decisive NO vote, combined with the building of rank-and-file committees, is the necessary first step to break the cycle of sellouts and wage a genuine fight for the rights and living standards of all grocery workers.



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