

A summer of sellouts: UFCW pushes through three grocery contracts in one week amid growing rank-and-file resistance

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A wave of sellout contracts has swept through the grocery industry this summer. The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) is engaged in a calculated campaign to block strikes and impose pro-company agreements across the country.

Within the last week, the UFCW announced the ratification of three separate agreements. Between August 15 and August 21, three deals were declared “ratified” by the UFCW:

- August 15 — Stater Bros.: Covers 12,000 workers across Southern California.
- August 21 — Kroger Indiana: Covers 8,000 workers, passed by a dubious 56 percent after two rejections.
- August 21 — Gelson’s: Covers roughly 2,000 Southern California workers.

This coordinated betrayal is taking place under conditions of escalating attacks on workers and democratic rights by the Trump administration, which is carrying out a coup d’état in Washington D.C. The UFCW bureaucracy, working hand in glove with corporate management and the state, is systematically isolating struggles, rushing votes, withholding information and forcing through poverty contracts. In the end, it presents every betrayal as a “historic victory.”

Yet cracks are emerging. Despite the UFCW’s efforts, the revolt at Kroger in Indiana—where workers twice rejected agreements before a highly suspicious ratification—signals growing rank-and-file opposition to the union’s stranglehold and exposes the unsustainability of its pro-corporate strategy.

These deals share the same playbook: suppress strike action, limit information, restrict worker discussion and ram through agreements that protect corporate profits while locking workers into poverty.

The poverty imposed on grocery workers stands in stark

contrast to the billions generated by the companies and the six-figure salaries of corporate executives and union officials alike. In California’s urban centers, where rents, food, transportation and healthcare costs are skyrocketing, the average grocery wage of \$16 to \$18 an hour falls far below what is needed for a decent living.

A worker earning \$17 an hour cannot afford even a modest one-bedroom apartment in Los Angeles, San Diego or the Bay Area without spending over half their income on rent. For thousands of Stater Bros., Gelson’s, Ralphs and Kroger employees, full-time jobs still mean constant economic insecurity and debt.

At Stater Bros., 12,000 Southern California grocery workers voted overwhelmingly to authorize a strike, signaling their readiness to confront a company that generated \$5 billion in revenue in 2024 and reported \$9.2 million in profits in early 2025.

The UFCW leadership, bound by its alliance with corporate management, sabotaged workers’ resolve. Instead of organizing a genuine strike across stores and uniting all simultaneous grocery struggles, the bureaucracy staged token single-store “boycotts” and reframed the conflict around narrower Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) charges.

Then, without warning, the UFCW announced a tentative agreement and rushed through a ratification vote. Workers were given virtually no meaningful details, no time to analyze the contract, and no opportunity to organize opposition. Predictably, the bureaucracy declared a “historic victory” on August 15.

In Indiana, workers rejected two consecutive tentative agreements, reflecting growing resistance to poverty wages and unsafe conditions. In response, UFCW Local 700 launched a relentless campaign of fear-mongering, pressure, and manipulation.

On August 21, the union claimed the deal had been ratified by a suspiciously narrow 56 percent margin. Workers were given no independently verified ballot counts and no detailed breakdown of the vote.

The fact that two deals were rejected before this outcome exposes deep opposition among rank-and-file workers. The Indiana struggle reveals that UFCW's ability to enforce corporate demands is increasingly fragile. Resistance is surfacing beneath the surface: if organized, it can become a powerful challenge to the bureaucracy's authority.

Just two days before announcing the Stater Bros. deal, on August 13, the UFCW declared a tentative agreement at Gelson's Markets covering roughly 2,000 Southern California workers. The union flooded workers with slogans about "higher wages for EVERY worker," "improved pensions," and "better healthcare," promising "significant gains for all of us."

In reality, the deal is a masterclass in deception:

Food Clerk, GM/Meat Clerk, and Meat Cutter Top Rate workers will see \$0.50 raises every six months, except for the first year.

- **Courtesy Clerks** with nine months or more, currently earning \$17.08 per hour, will receive just an extra \$0.10 per hour until California's minimum wage increases on January 1, 2026.

- A \$0.25 per hour supplemental pension contribution starting in 2026 is meaningless amid rising costs, while the frozen \$2.85/hour base pension contribution amounts to a de facto cut, eroding retirement security.

- So-called healthcare "improvements" are built on cost-shifting: delayed eligibility, restricted dependent coverage, audits to drop spouses and children, and rising out-of-pocket expenses.

UFCW Local 770, again, limited worker discussion by holding only two controlled Zoom "informational meetings" on August 17 and 18, giving workers the following two days—August 19 and 20—to vote. On August 21, the local announced the contract was ratified but refused to provide turnout numbers or detailed results.

But Local 1167 in San Bernardino declared the deal ratified on August 19, before workers in the other local even finished voting.

Over the past year, the UFCW has forced through pro-company contracts covering more than 100,000 workers:

- **Ralphs, Albertsons, Vons, Pavilions (Southern California):** 45,000 workers

- **Northern California Safeway:** 25,000 workers

- **UFCW 3000 (Puget Sound Region):** 25,000 workers

across Washington, eastern Oregon, and north Idaho

Pacific Northwest UFCW Local 367: 7,000 workers

The UFCW leadership is working hand in hand with the companies to stop strikes and keep workers divided. These union officials aren't fighting for workers—they make six-figure salaries while helping management push corporate interests.

Despite the UFCW's success in pushing through these contracts, cracks are widening. Workers across the country are showing they are not willing to accept endless concessions, fraudulent votes, and secretive deals. What's missing is a coordinated, organized movement capable of transforming these scattered acts of defiance into a unified national struggle.

To break out of this cycle of betrayal, workers must take matters into their own hands by forming independent rank-and-file committees, democratic bodies controlled by workers, not the union bureaucracy.

These committees must:

- **Demand rank-and-file auditing of the vote:** Workers must have access to the balloting records to ensure the integrity of the vote. But no contract vote pushed under threats, or before workers have had a chance to review it, should be considered legitimate.

- **Seize control of negotiations:** Bargaining sessions must be livestreamed for full transparency.

- **Unite across workplaces:** Link workers at Stater Bros., Ralphs, Gelson's, Safeway, Kroger, and beyond, from logistics to teachers to health care workers.

- **Prepare mass action:** Organize general strikes independent of UFCW or other union control.

- **Fight for workers' needs:** Demand what workers require, not what corporations claim they can afford.

- **Confront the political establishment:** Oppose both the Trump administration and the Democratic Party, which jointly defend corporate interests and suppress worker struggles.



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