

Strike votes scheduled for King Soopers grocery workers in Colorado

Alex Findijs
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Grocery workers: Tell us what your working conditions are like and what your demands are! Fill out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

United Food and Commercial Workers Local 7R has called for a strike vote at the King Soopers grocery chain in Colorado after the last contract expired last week. Workers have been without a contract since January 17, when the union and management failed to reach a deal following a two-week contract extension.

This would be the second strike by King Soopers workers in as many contracts, following a 10-day strike in 2022. Thousands of Safeway workers throughout the state are also pushing for a strike after their contract extension expires on Friday.

The timing also lines up with a potential strike action by 18,000 Costco workers, primarily on the West Coast. Together, strikes by tens of thousands of grocery workers could become one of the first major labor struggles under the new Trump administration.

The company's latest proposal increases out-of-pocket healthcare costs, includes below-inflation raises that keep workers below a living wage, attacks overtime pay and reduces the number of guaranteed hours for part-time employees.

Another central issue for workers at King Soopers, a Kroger subsidiary, as well as Safeway, an Albertsons-owned chain, is staffing. Kroger has seen a sharp drop in employment in recent years. After reaching a peak of 465,000 employees in 2021 total employment has dropped to 414,000, the lowest since 2015.

Kroger and retail stores around the country are trying to cut down on labor costs by reducing employment, favoring part-time work and suppressing wages. In its 2023 annual report, management reported that the average wage for a Kroger worker was just \$19 an hour, or around \$25 in value with benefits. This is well below what MIT's Living Wage Calculator estimated as the average living

wage in America of \$25 an hour for both working parents of a family of four, or \$104,000 a year.

Low wages for Kroger employees have severe results. An analysis of Kroger workers by the Economic Roundtable published in 2022 found that 63 percent of respondents reported not having enough money to cover basic expenses each month, while 85 percent reported some level of food insecurity.

Meanwhile, Kroger boasted more than \$4 billion in profit each year for the past few years and recently approved a \$7.5 billion stock buyback to enrich its investors. In 2023 Kroger posted \$5 billion in profit, enough to give all current employees \$12,000 per year, or nearly \$6 an hour raise.

Delays in strike vote

While workers are determined to fight, the UFCW bureaucracy is doing everything to hold them back. A critical task workers confront is the development of rank-and-file committees to enforce democratic control over their own struggle.

The union has dragged its feet in calling a strike vote, meaning workers could go more than a month past the expiration of their contract before a strike is called.

Voting for strike action is scheduled to take place on January 29 and 30 and will involve thousands of workers in Denver, Boulder, Parker and Broomfield. King Soopers workers in Colorado Springs and Pueblo will vote on January 31 and February 1.

Voting will be held at DoubleTree hotels in Westminster and Glenwood Village, two cities on the outskirts of the Denver metro area, with three sessions each day at 9:00 a.m., 1:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.

The extensive delay in organizing a strike vote, despite months of no progress in negotiations with management, has drawn questions from workers. The union has simply responded with a copy-paste response telling workers that “we had to work out logistics to find venues for our membership. We also have pre-scheduled bargaining with Safeway this week. This was the soonest we could schedule a vote. We need to stay strong and unified.”

Three years ago, under pressure from the rank and file, the union held a strike vote before the contract expired. Workers were determined to fight against low wages against a corporate giant that demanded that workers sacrifice through a pandemic for its profits. At the time the union had put forward public demands for a \$6.00 an hour raise across the board and an additional \$1.50 an hour raise in each additional year of the contract amidst rapidly rising inflation.

The sellout contract that the union ultimately pushed through after 10 days on strike was barely an improvement over the company’s offer, with starting wages just 30 cents above that proposed by management. It included a “favored nation” clause that would allow the company to import lower wages from a union contract with another employer, something the union had said was a “red line.”

Given only a couple hours to see the contract details before voting, workers were furious with their union leadership for calling off the strike and pushing through a contract that did not meet their demands.

This time around, the union is dragging its feet as much as possible. It extended the contract by two weeks and failed to organize a strike vote before the contract expired.

So far the union has not even put forward any concrete demands and has refused to communicate with members about what union officials are proposing. One worker noted on the union’s Facebook page: “Last strike we did the union was very out spoken with what we wanted.. thats not the case this time.. I know yall have made many proposals but why have we heard of none? I’ve listened to the last town hall and everything sounded good except you told nothing about wages.. I know the company hasn’t released staffing numbers and cannot move forward with out them.. as a union member I seem to be in the dark.. this is nothing like the last one.”

Replying to requests from workers for more information about the negotiations, the union responded that “we have not yet been able to put a wage proposal on the table yet. We are still working through language items. The Union has placed several language proposals on the table and the

company has refused to engage in meaningful discussions regarding member proposals. Additionally, the company barely gave the Union some of the data needed to put a staffing proposal on the table. The health and welfare proposal and pension proposals are also inadequate and do not fully fund the health benefits. The Union has put a proposal on the table that would guarantee that your health benefits remain fully funded but that it would increase benefits for workers.”

While the union drags out the path to strike action as long as possible, workers are ready to fight for what they deserve. One worker posted on social media, “Let’s make this strike one to remember! No more tiers, everyone deserves the same holiday pay and holidays. Sunday pay, better benefits, and incentive pay for those slammed days should be the goal. Let’s unite and make a real difference!”

Another said “Very few employees are happy with their jobs and how they are treated. The company is wanting to eliminate jobs, period!! Watch how many self checkouts there will be as our hours are chipped away at.”

Workers must begin organizing now, not after the strike vote is cast. King Soopers workers must build rank-and-file committees in every store to put the initiative in the hands of the rank-and-file membership and link their struggle together with those of Safeway workers, who are also represented under UFCW Local 7R and will see their contract expire soon.

Only through the independent mobilization of the rank and file can King Soopers workers fight for and win what they deserve.



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