

King Soopers grocery workers in Colorado vote for strike, planned for February 6

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Work at King Soopers? Tell us what you're demanding in the upcoming strike. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Workers at the Kroger-owned grocery chain King Soopers have authorized strike action across the front range of Colorado. Workers in Colorado Springs, Pueblo, Boulder and the Denver metro area authorized strike action with votes ranging from 90 to 100 percent in favor of striking.

United Food and Commercial Workers union local 7R announced that workers in Denver, Broomfield, Boulder and Parker will walk off the job at 5:00 a.m. on Thursday February 6 for two weeks. Workers in Colorado Springs and Pueblo will not be called out on strike yet, ostensibly because the contracts for meat department workers do not expire until February 15.

Major issues for workers include pay below the living wage in Colorado and reduced staffing levels which have placed huge burdens on workers.

King Soopers' contract offer includes modest wage increases that barely keep up with inflation and keep starting pay just above the minimum wage, and top rate below the living wage for Denver of roughly \$25 an hour. Management has also demanded increases to employee healthcare costs and a reduction in minimum guaranteed hours for part-time workers to 16 hours a week.

This is the second contract in a row that Colorado King Soopers workers have authorized strike action. Three years ago, roughly 8,000 workers in the Denver area walked off the job in a 10-day strike. An estimated 10,000 workers at 77 stores are expected to go on strike in one of the first major labor struggles under the new Trump administration.

Contracts are also being negotiated for stores at City Market on the Western Slope of Colorado, also owned by Kroger, and at Safeway, which is owned by Albertsons. Despite the contract at Safeway also expiring at the same

time, giving the potential for a unified strike at both grocery giants, the UFCW announced that the contract at Safeway would be extended indefinitely until either the union or management decided to break off negotiations.

The union said that it agreed to this "in light of the upcoming strike votes for King Soopers workers," meaning that the union leadership made a conscious decision to split the struggles of grocery workers in Colorado to avoid a joint strike.

This is reminiscent of three years ago, when the union extended the Safeway contract until after the strike and kept King Soopers workers in Colorado Springs on the job even as Denver workers began picketing.

Workers at City Market are also ready to strike, but have not had a strike vote scheduled. Some workers have reported that the union has simply told them that they are working on putting together a strike vote without any information about when.

Support for strike action from the rank-and-file is extensive. Many workers took to the union's Facebook page to ask for information about when the strike would be called after the result of the authorization vote was announced. Several expressed impatience with the union for not moving more quickly to take strike action, pointing out that the company is flying in scabs from other states, citing the proximity to the Super Bowl for disrupting sales, and even the nice weather as reasons to call a strike sooner rather than later.

One worker wrote, "Seriously why aren't we out? Worked today with 2 cashier's both on u scan. Come on I'm tired and frustrated what's the hold up? Strike seriously!!!"

Many workers have also expressed frustration that not all workers will strike at the same time. Not only will Colorado Springs and Pueblo have to wait until their meat department contracts expire, but stores in Fort Collins, Greeley, Loveland and Longmont have contracts in effect

until February 15. Some have asked why not wait until all locations can strike at once, while others have questioned why the union negotiated contracts to expire at different times, undercutting the ability of all King Soopers workers to strike together.

The union has responded to these questions with patronizing, simply saying that there is “a lot going on,” implying that it can’t handle both King Soopers and Safeway at the same time, or even multiple strike votes, and that it has to focus on one issue before another.

This raises the question of what is the union bureaucracy even for if it cannot handle the most basic tasks of a workers’ organization? The UFCW, after betraying the strike three years ago and forcing workers to vote on a contract, did not allow workers to see the deal until the same day as voting. Now, it has dragged its feet on negotiations and strike preparations. Union officials had three years to prepare for contract negotiations and another potential strike, but have acted as if they are overwhelmed by developments.

During the last contract struggle the union held a strike vote before the contract expired, under pressure from the rank-and-file, giving workers time to prepare. This year, the union leadership has stalled as much as possible while also avoiding the potential for strikes in multiple areas to coincide.

A last-minute deal or resumption of negotiations should not take workers by surprise. The strike three years ago was called off prematurely to present a sellout agreement at voting, breaking the momentum of the strike and discouraging enough workers to push through ratification.

Even nearly a month after the initial expiration of the contract, the union has yet to put forward any economic demands on the company, claiming that it has not been able to put together contract language on wages. This is despite the union putting forward a demand for an upfront \$6 an hour wage increase across the board three years ago, a demand it abandoned in the final contract. When workers ask what the union is negotiating for, they are just directed to the union’s website homepage with no actual information or told they should have attended a bargaining session.

Furthermore, the union has limited the scope of the strike to an Unfair Labor Practice strike, meaning that the union leadership could call off any strike action at a moment’s notice without a vote from the membership and is not allowed to raise economic demands during the strike. This is a common tactic by unions across the country to enable bureaucrats to rein in labor struggles

and sabotage strikes, including the strike three years ago.

Should it go forward, this strike will be one of the first major labor struggles under the second Trump administration, which is planning to strip away regulations and labor protections, slash taxes for the super rich and corporations, and pay for war preparations by suppressing wages and the class struggle.

Amidst these coming attacks on the working class, of which Trump’s mass deportations of immigrants is the spearhead, union bureaucrats are lining up behind Trump. United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain said he approved of Trump’s trade war tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China, and Teamsters President Sean O’Brien has been cozying up to Trump and fascist Republican Senator Josh Hawley.

Bureaucrats in the UFCW like Kim Cordova, who makes over \$200,000 a year and has been accused of mistreating union employees, will have their eye on upholding “labor peace.”

To prevent another sellout like that in 2022, King Soopers workers must take the initiative for themselves. Workers must build rank-and-file strike committees in every store and connect with Safeway workers and non-union grocery workers across the state. Only by establishing rank-and-file power on the shop floor can workers take control of the strike out of the hands of the bureaucracy and unify workers in a common struggle.

These committees must also take up the defense of immigrant workers who are being threatened with Gestapo-style raids by the Trump administration. Nearly one in five workers in the retail industry are immigrants, meaning that grocery workers must take up the defense of their coworkers against anti-immigrant attacks.



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