

10,000 King Soopers workers launch two-week strike

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Roughly 10,000 grocery workers at the Kroger owned chain King Soopers walked off the job Thursday at 77 stores across the Denver metro area and in Boulder, Colorado. Another 2,000 workers are involved in contract struggles in Pueblo, Colorado Springs and at City Market on the western slope, with workers in Pueblo set to join the strike on Friday. Workers in Colorado Springs voted to authorize strike action but have contracts still in effect up to February 15, and City Market employees have not had a strike vote scheduled. City Market is owned by King Soopers.

The strikers are members of the United Food and Commercial Workers union Local 7R (UFCW), which has 23,000 members across Colorado and Wyoming. They are demanding better wages, improved staffing and the protection of benefits from proposed cuts in the company's contract proposals. The UFCW called for a two-week strike that could be extended and expanded to other parts of Colorado.

Management's offer would provide wage increases that barely keep up with inflation and keep wages below the living wage in Denver, as well as have workers pay for those wage gains with cuts to the pension and increases in employee healthcare costs. The proposal also seeks to reduce the number of minimum guaranteed hours for part-time employees to 16, threatening to turn the workforce into a caste of low-paid part-time workers.

Staffing is a significant issue, with workers saying that stores have been understaffed to the point of being unsafe. This is not just in the number of people in the stores but also in the total number of work hours allocated to employees. According to the union, Kroger has cut store work hours by up to 18 percent since 2020 in Colorado.

In other parts of the country, Kroger is attempting to

push through tiered wages scales that would base seniority pay on annual hours worked and allow management to reduce pay if workers worked too few hours in a 12 month period. By reducing minimum hours and pushing for reduced staffing Kroger and King Soopers are attempting to squeeze as much profit out of a smaller workforce as possible. Kroger's workforce has fallen to a nine-year low at 414,000 employees, significantly lower than its peak of 465,000 workers in 2021.

These attacks on workers are made at the same time that Kroger is making record profits, meanwhile approving massive stock buybacks to enrich investors and launching a failed \$25 billion effort to purchase rival grocery chain Albertsons. Albertsons owns Safeway, with which the UFCW is also currently negotiating a new contract.

This is the second contract in a row that workers at King Soopers have launched a major strike. Three years ago roughly 8,000 workers walked off the job for 10 days with the union raising the demand for a \$6 an hour across-the-board wage increase.

The strike was sold out, however, with the UFCW calling off the strike prematurely after reaching a tentative agreement with management that workers were not allowed to see until the day of voting. Having broken the momentum of the strike, the union bureaucracy was able to push through a sellout contract with wage increases only slightly higher than that proposed by management.

Three years later, the union has not made any economic demands on the company, claiming to need data on staffing and sales numbers from management in order to do so.

Instead, the strike, as previously, was called as an unfair labor practices (ULP) strike. This means the

union is striking against the company for failing to bargain in good faith while it reserves the right to call off the strike without member approval at any time if it feels that management has begun to bargain faithfully.

Nevertheless, the strike is a powerful expression of the opposition in the working class to attacks on wages, jobs and benefits. Kroger has consistently demanded that workers pay for even greater profits and King Soopers workers have rejected this twice in a row. The strike is a continuation of a wave of major strikes in 2024, including the strike at Boeing and the east coast docks, and is one of the first major strikes to be called under the second Trump administration.

Trump is seeking to dismantle basic legal and democratic rights for workers through his attacks on regulations on business and the legal rights of workers, and his trade war policies that threaten to cause a massive cost-of-living crisis.

His administration serves openly and directly on the behalf of the oligarchs like Musk, Bezos and Zuckerberg. While Kroger is not run by a billionaire, its largest investors include firms like Blackrock and Vanguard, which manage hundreds of billions in assets. When management demands substandard wage increases and cuts in hours it is doing so on behalf of Wall Street and the corporate oligarchy.

The strike at King Soopers is the opening act to an intensification of the class struggle under Trump's rule. His policies of protectionism, trade war and imperialist plunder require the immiseration of the working class to prop up the profits of the oligarchy. But workers will not take this idly and the second strike at King Soopers demonstrates that workers are ready and willing to fight to not only defend their living standards and rights but to fight for what they deserve.



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