

UFCW: Hold the Line for America's Health Care

Who are the grocery workers?

* The 70,000 grocery workers on strike in Southern California at Vons (Safeway), Ralphs (Kroger) and Albertson's are community members whom shoppers know and recognize.

*In Southern California, approximately 65% of grocery workers are women, and approximately 35% are Asian, Latino, or African-American workers. Many are single heads of households.

*Supermarket workers in Southern California average about \$12-14 per hour with an average work week of 30 hours – about \$19,000 annually.

Why did they vote to strike?

* The employers' demand the effective elimination of health benefits for all future employees.

* The employers will not provide adequate funding to maintain existing health benefits for current employees. Workers could face average weekly premiums of \$95 or a 50% cut in benefits over the term of the contract.

* The employers also demand a wage freeze for current employees and a permanent reduction in wages for new hires. Under the employers' proposal, the workers' pension fund would also be under-funded.

Who are the employers?

* Safeway, Kroger and Albertson's are the three largest supermarket companies with more than 7,300 supermarkets between them. All three are in the top Fortune 50 corporations.

* One out of every four dollars spent on groceries in the U.S. is spent at a store owned by one of these three companies. In Southern California, six out of every ten grocery dollars is spent at a store owned by one of these three companies.

* In 2002, combined operating profits at these three big supermarket giants was \$9.7 billion dollars: Kroger - \$3.8 billion, Albertson's- \$2.8 billion, Safeway: \$3.1 billion.

* Over the past five years, operating profits at each of these companies has grown -- Safeway up 47%; Albertsons up 101%; Kroger up 143%. Combined profits are up 91%.

* Wal-Mart has not stopped these companies from growing over the last decade. Fortune Magazine ranked the annual rate of total return to investors at all three companies higher than that at Wal-Mart.

What happens if workers lose this battle?

* If three of the top 50 corporations in the U.S. abandon health care benefits for their employees, the employment-based health care system could collapse. All workers are at risk of losing affordable work-based health benefits.