

“Without immigrants, there is no food, there is no work”: JBS meatpackers defend immigrants as historic strike continues at Greeley, Colorado plant

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Thousands of meatpackers at the JBS plant in Greeley, Colorado continued their strike Tuesday, one day after 3,800 workers walked out in the largest meatpacking struggle since the 1950s.

Workers at the Greeley plant exemplify the international character of the working class. On the picket line, workers speak Spanish, Creole, English and dozens of other languages.

Tuesday’s picket, like Monday’s, was well attended by workers, who voted overwhelmingly to strike. Workers at the plant are part of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 7.

While workers are determined to fight for better wages and working conditions, the union has already signaled it intends to limit the strike to two weeks. This is despite the fact that the company has shown no indication it will raise starting wages of \$23 an hour to levels commensurate with the backbreaking and deadly work at the plant.

For workers at JBS and across the country, the critical task remains building independent rank-and-file committees, free from company and union control, to advance workers’ demands.

Workers should recall that the two major strikes in the 1980s, the most recent struggles by meatpacking workers, were betrayed by the UFCW. In the Hormel strike in 1985-86, the national union worked with the AFL-CIO bureaucracy to decertify the local union, P-9, recruit the strikebreakers to replace the 1,500 strikers, and impose a concessionary contract. At IBP (Iowa Beef Processors) a year later, the company first imposed a lockout, ending it only to hire strikebreakers when the 2,500 workers refused to go back to work. After seven months, the UFCW signed an agreement that imposed major concessions.

WSWS reporters spoke with workers throughout the day about the strike and the way forward. Carlos said he was on

strike because “we need better wages and better working conditions. For us to get done with work and not be dead tired, falling asleep on the way home. It’s dangerous.

“The line is so fast it’s hard to get the job done quality-wise. You will be doing a piece and there will be two more coming. They pile stuff on you, the supervisors are on your back yelling at you. You got the QAs (Quality Assurance), you got the green hats yelling at you. The way they treat you is pretty bad. They give you problems for going to the bathroom, simple things like that.”

Carlos and his wife have four children, and both must work to make ends meet. “My one job should be enough for us to survive,” Carlos said. His wife noted that when she picks him up from work, he is often so exhausted he falls asleep on the ride home. Carlos has worked at the plant for two years and earns \$24.75 an hour.

Though he has not yet suffered a major injury, Carlos said he can already feel the physical toll. “My hand is kind of starting to get a little numb on me. In the mornings it will lock up, I’m pretty sure I’m starting to get carpal tunnel.”

He also described the company charging workers for lost or damaged equipment. “I lost my mesh glove and they charged me \$100 for a replacement. They don’t want to give out replacements even though the equipment gets ruined from working. The company should be paying for the protective equipment.”

While workers have insurance, the deductibles are so high many cannot afford care. “You are paying so much out of pocket,” he said.

Between the speed-up, dangerous conditions and constant harassment, tensions run high. But when workers file grievances, “it doesn’t seem like they go anywhere. You can grieve and grieve and grieve but it doesn’t go anywhere.”

Carlos confirmed the company is attempting to undermine the strike by ordering workers back. He received a text

Tuesday morning reading, “All Fab A Shift Production Team, we are scheduled to run production at 9:30 AM on Tuesday, 3/17/2026.”

Few appear to have complied. Thousands of workers across multiple shifts continued picketing throughout the day.

Asked about Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Carlos said he had not seen agents at the plant. Referring to immigration police, he said, “They go after hard-working people with families, they split away dads and stuff, send them to prison basically.”

Carlos said Haitian immigrants were recruited through TikTok ads promising good pay. When they arrived, however, “they were sticking everybody in the Rainbow Motel,” or in overcrowded houses, “30 people sharing one bathroom, all living in one house.”

“They all have families,” he said. “They have kids, and they are all forced to sleep together, sometimes on the floor. It’s horrible, nobody should have to live like that. That’s like slave ship stuff, you know? Like all we are allowed to do is work.”

Rejecting attempts to divide workers, Carlos said, “We represent the immigrants and all the people of color. That’s us, that’s the people that are doing these jobs.”

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He agreed that workers should establish communication between plants to prevent JBS from shifting production. “We can do that, have more people back us up in the fight. Then we can all get better wages, not only for us, but them too. We can come together and do that.”

Carlos’ wife added, “Everything should change at all the plants.” She said it feels like her husband “is working himself to death.”

The WSWS also spoke with Tanya, Sandra and Jesse. Tanya said, “They only care about safety conditions when somebody gets hurt or when there are visitors. That’s the only time they worry about safety.”

“As soon as visitors leave, they speed up the chain. That’s how we know we have visitors, the chain slows down.”

Sandra added, “You will see the supervisors telling the cleaning people, ‘Clean, clean, clean, we are going to have visitors,’ and we know they are going to slow down the chain.”

Jesse said, “Then they speed it up so they won’t have to pay for eight hours of work.”

“They don’t care about the workers,” Tanya added. “They only care about production. People get hurt. They don’t care.”

All agreed the company retaliates against those who raise concerns. “They pick on the person and send them to the

office.” Asked what the union does, the workers looked at each other and said, “Nothing,” before adding maybe a visit to HR.

“HR does whatever they want, that’s how it is, pure corruption,” Tanya said.

Steve said he joined the strike over “how they treat us in there” and low wages. “We are just trying to keep up with the cost of living because everything is going up so much. We need better wages.”

He noted that rent in Greeley runs “anywhere from \$1,800 a month to over \$2,000.”

The company’s latest offer includes a 60-cent increase, followed by just 30 cents annually. With inflation above 3 percent and energy prices rising due to the illegal war against Iran, workers would effectively take a pay cut.

Asked if he supported a \$33 starting wage, Steve agreed immediately. “Especially for the stress our bodies endure. The chain moves so freaking fast.”

“A lot of people get injured. I see it almost every day. People getting cut, stabbed, poked, everything, just because they don’t slow it down. Even when we are short workers, the chain’s still the same.”

He added that the speed-up is driven in part by the company’s refusal to pay full hours. “We don’t even get up to 40 hours a week.”

Steve said the company is offering work to those who sign a disclosure form. UFCW Local 7 has limited the strike to two weeks, but many workers remain uncertain about what happens next.

“From what I understand the strike is two weeks,” Steve said, “but we don’t know. Nobody actually knows when they go back to the table.”

He said workers at the JBS plant in Cactus, Texas, where cattle from Greeley are being diverted, should refuse to handle scab product. “Stay together. I’m pretty sure they are going to try to speed up the chain over in Texas.”

“Whatever conditions they force on us,” he said, “they can do the same over there.”



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