

# Brazilian JBS workers speak out on wages, degrading conditions and the Greeley strike in US

**Our reporters**  
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Last Friday, reporters for the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) visited the JBS Jaguaré plant in São Paulo to speak with Brazilian workers about the historic strike by their fellow workers at the company's plant in Greeley, Colorado—the largest work stoppage in the US meatpacking industry since the 1950s, now entering its third week.

The WSWS team distributed a Portuguese language version of the statement “Organize the working class to support the JBS meatpacking strike!” which calls for the international unification of JBS workers as the only effective path to confronting the transnational company and winning real improvements in working conditions and wages across all the countries in which it operates.

The distribution took place against the backdrop of the rapidly escalating global capitalist crisis and the criminal US-Israeli war against Iran. The war on Iran has already triggered a sharp rise in oil and fuel prices worldwide, directly striking Brazilian workers. Donald Trump's tariff offensive is deepening trade tensions and intensifying the assault on the living standards of the working class in both countries. The same pressures that drove Greeley workers to launch a strike are present, with equal force, at JBS plants in Brazil.

Despite the Greeley strike having continued for two weeks, most workers the WSWS spoke with at the Jaguaré plant were unaware of its existence. This news blackout is not accidental.

## Workers speak out on wages, conditions and JBS

A factory worker, upon receiving the WSWS leaflet, was direct: “Something is going on, because the money isn't enough. If we can't have a slightly better quality of life—because it seems like things keep falling further behind—what needs to be adjusted? It's the wages, to keep up with our expenses, right?”

The Jaguaré complex, which specializes in margarine production, was formerly owned by the US-based corporation Bunge and was acquired by JBS in 2019. The base wage at the plant is R\$2,543 (US\$486) per month for a 44-hour work week—three times less than the Necessary Minimum Wage calculated by DIEESE, defined as the minimum for a worker to support a family of four in Brazil, which stands at approximately R\$7,629 (US\$1,459) per month.

A group of three cleaning workers, upon hearing from the WSWS team that workers in the United States “are on strike over very low wages and conditions that wear workers down very quickly,” responded without hesitation: “We know exactly what that's like.”

The WSWS also spoke with independent truck drivers responsible for

distributing the plant's products. More than one of them, when approached, said spontaneously: “This company is garbage.”

One of them, Gilson, described in detail the disorganization and lack of basic humanity in the company's operations:

Man, every place has its problems. But here it's something else. There's so much disregard for people. Just today, one of the drivers knocked down a wall inside while maneuvering. The scale has been broken for days, so we have to go inside to sign the invoice. The guy tried to back up and there wasn't enough space. He hit the wall. He's going to have to pay for it, and he'll be blocked, [i.e. barred from working for the company].

Hélio, a truck driver who previously had a formal employment contract with JBS and now works for the company as an independent contractor, pointed directly to the company's freight rate squeeze: “They showed the [company's] freight rate table. But it's wrong. Because they're so well-connected with the government, no one talks about it. But to put it plainly: they don't follow the official freight table. The standard rate for trucks, for example, is R\$3.80 (US\$0.73) per kilometer. Here they pay R\$2.50 (US\$0.48). That's R\$1.30 (US\$0.25) less. Hell, if you drove from here to Rio de Janeiro and back, that's R\$1,300 (US\$249) less on your freight. They pay four thousand [R\$4,000, US\$765]; you should be earning R\$5,300 (US\$1,014).”

Hélio also spoke about the impact of the war against Iran on fuel prices: “It's going to have an effect, it's going to hurt.” Recent surveys indicate that diesel prices have risen nearly 20 percent at distributors and fuel stations across Brazil. “There are gas stations out there where diesel is already R\$8.80 (US\$1.68) a liter—it's outrageous,” he said. “Since I only drive in the city it's still just about manageable, but putting the truck on the highway just doesn't pay.”

## Union bureaucracy's hostility to the international unity of JBS workers

Representatives of the Union of Workers in the Dairy and Food Industries of São Paulo (STILASP) had visited the Jaguaré plant just days earlier, with the stated purpose of “directly engaging with workers, listening to their demands and reinforcing the importance of collective organization” and “broadening resistance against the employer's attacks.”

The last thing that could have crossed these bureaucrats' minds was to draw attention to the historic strike at the company's Greeley plant—which is not so much as mentioned by the union.

This silence is not a casual omission. JBS workers in Brazil, the United States and other countries are all subordinated to a single regime of exploitation for the benefit of the same international financial oligarchy, and united by the same objective class interests. The union bureaucracies—in Brazil as in the United States—are actively opposed to the political affirmation of that unity. While cross-border unification is the greatest weapon JBS workers have in confronting the corporation, the union bureaucracies have their interests and operations firmly anchored in the outmoded bourgeois nation-state.

STILASP's leadership, installed in August 2024 in a single-slate electoral process, placed the "defense of Brazil's reindustrialization" at the center of its political program—an explicitly nationalist program aligned with big capital. Its inauguration ceremony was held at the headquarters of the General Union of Workers (UGT), in a joint affiliation event attended by UGT president Ricardo Patah and Antônio Magri, former Labor Minister under the right-wing government of Fernando Collor.

The UGT is historically associated with *pelego* unionism—company unionism—and with the semi-fascist nationalist laborism of former president Getúlio Vargas. Alongside the other Brazilian union federations, the UGT has responded to the world capitalist crisis and the escalation of imperialist aggression with an increasingly open defense of the interests of Brazilian big capital.

In response to Trump's tariffs against Brazil—launched in 2025 as an open act of imperialist intervention in defense of the former fascist President Jair Bolsonaro—the union federations met with representatives of the PT government and national business representatives and published a document which, as the Socialist Equality Group (SEG) wrote at the time, expressed support for the "positions of the National Congress and the Supreme Court," hailed expressions of opposition from "sectors of the press and the business community," and proposed "creating permanent spaces for collaboration between government, workers and employers."

The reactionary nationalist program advocated by the trade unions represents a call for continuing the capitalist policies pursued under the first PT administrations of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva at the beginning of the 21st century, which built up JBS as the massive transnational corporation it is today.

In what became known as the "national champions" policy, the PT administration selected a handful of private groups to receive colossal sums of state investment and political backing. In the context of the so-called "commodities boom" driven by the growth of Chinese economy, the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES) injected at least 8.1 billion reais (approximately US\$3.24 billion) into the Batista brothers' meatpacking company between 2005 and 2014, financing a sequence of acquisitions across four continents — including Swift and Pilgrim's Pride in the United States, Tasman in Australia, Inalca in Italy, and Swift Armour in Argentina. JBS's revenues jumped from 4 billion reais (US\$1.86 billion) in 2006 to 170 billion (US\$48.6 billion) in 2016: a 3,400 percent increase in ten years, bankrolled with public money and converted into private profit.

This process did not merely produce a large company; it produced a distinct financial oligarchy in Brazil. When a massive corruption scandal involving JBS and the Brazilian political establishment erupted in 2017, Joesley Batista revealed during his plea bargain depositions that the JBS controller had paid approximately R\$500 million (US\$156 million) in bribes to politicians from virtually every relevant party in the country, including presidents of the Republic, ministers and senior BNDES officials. While Joesley and his brother spent some six months in jail, these capitalist oligarchs' power was preserved intact.

The overwhelming influence of the Bastistas, emblematic of the parasitic financial elite over political life in Brazil and beyond, emerged with full force in relation to the recent explosive developments related to the US imperialist drive on Latin America.

When US tariffs on Brazilian beef exports were raised to 76 percent, Joesley Batista arranged, totally independent from Brazil's diplomatic channels, a 30-minute meeting with Trump in the Oval Office—reportedly the only Brazilian businessman to have gained direct access to the American fascist—to argue that the tariffs were disrupting JBS's global operations.

This same role as an extra-official political operator assumed an even more sinister form months later, in November 2025, just weeks before the US military invasion of Venezuela, Batista secretly traveled to Caracas to meet with Nicolás Maduro—with the knowledge of the White House according to Bloomberg—to persuade him to relinquish power. No episode more clearly illustrates what the power of a transnational capitalist oligarchy actually means in concrete terms: the capacity to operate simultaneously in meat markets, on the New York Stock Exchange and behind the scenes of a military regime-change operation.

It is in this context that the character of the relationship between JBS and the union federations must be understood. Batista's plea agreement revealed not only revealed his relations to the political establishment, but to the official unions themselves. He cultivated massively lucrative operations with workers' pension funds—the Funcef, covering Caixa Econômica Federal employees, and Petros, covering Petrobras workers—and had his entry facilitated by CUT unions officials who sat on the co-managed boards of those funds.

Among those called in by the Federal Police for questioning in the investigations against Batista was none other than Ricardo Patah, president of the UGT, the same federation to which STILASP affiliated in a festive ceremony in August 2024. This was not a coincidence, but continuity: the same bureaucracy that helped build the JBS oligarchy with workers' money now presents itself as their representative at the gates of the Jaguaré plant.

The trajectory of JBS—from a regional slaughterhouse to a transnational corporation, built with public money, sustained by systemic corruption and operated as an instrument of imperialist policy—is the most eloquent indictment of the nationalist program promoted by the Brazilian unions, the PT and the pseudo-left. The history of JBS demonstrates, incontrovertibly, that there is no "national capital" to be defended against imperialism and that nationalism is not a weapon of the working class.

The interests of JBS workers and of the entire working class can be effectively defended only through the establishment of their active international unity, through the building of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). We encourage all workers who wish to discuss this perspective to contact the WSWs.



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