

“I’m all for everyone going on strike”: JBS meatpackers in Greeley, Colorado continue historic strike

Jacob Crosse, Dan Conway
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Nearly 4,000 meatpackers at the JBS Swift plant in Greeley, Colorado continued their historic strike on Thursday, in the largest meatpacking strike in the United States since the 1950s and the first major walkout in the industry since the Hormel and IBP strikes in the 1980s.

The walkout is part of a broader movement of workers, in the United States and internationally, who are increasingly entering into struggle against rising inequality, soaring health care costs and stagnant wages. At the Greeley plant, many workers make less than \$25 an hour and have not received a raise in nearly a year. JBS, which reported fourth-quarter net profits of \$415 million, has answered workers’ demands with an insulting proposal of a 60-cent raise, followed by just 20 cents the following year.

The strike has underscored the international unity of the working class. Many workers at the plant are immigrants, and more than 50 languages are spoken inside the facility. Reporters for the WSWs spoke with workers on Thursday and distributed hundreds of leaflets and statements in multiple languages, including Creole, Spanish, French, English and Somali. Workers responded warmly, with many approaching reporters and simply stating their preferred language before being handed material they could read immediately.

The UFCW bureaucracy, meanwhile, has sought to suppress and isolate the strike. On the picket line, union officials questioned why WSWs reporters were speaking with workers, reflecting their hostility to any independent discussion among the rank and file. Even as they attempted to monitor contact with workers, officials acknowledged that some production is continuing inside the plant.

When a WSWs reporter noted that it appeared scabs were entering the plant, the UFCW bureaucrat “corrected” the WSWs, stating those scabbing on the strike were, in fact, “replacement workers.” Against this effort to contain the strike, workers who spoke with the WSWs expressed determination to broaden the struggle and win support from other sections of the working class.

Samtou, an immigrant from Haiti, said she has been working at the plant for a total of about three years, off and on since 2020. She described the “dangerous” working conditions inside the plant, “especially if you don’t have the specific equipment you need.”

She mentioned mesh gloves that workers wear to avoid cuts, but that often go missing. “If you don’t wear it, you can cut yourself. If you lose it, or it’s stolen, you need to buy it and it comes out of our paycheck.”

“When I first came here to work in 2020, we weren’t forced to pay for equipment,” she added.

Samtou recalled working when COVID-19 first flooded through the plant, leaving hundreds of workers sick, and killing at least six. She said she remembered a co-worker falling ill and being told it was ok for him to stay home and recover, but that the company then fired him for not showing up to work.

WSWS reporters raised the recent intervention by supporters in Brazil at the JBS Jaguaré plant in São Paulo. We asked Samtou, in order to secure livable wages and safe working conditions, if she would support other JBS workers going on strike with Greeley workers. “Yes, of course. It is not like we are asking for a lot.” She added, “If workers in Brazil do that, I can say I appreciate that and their support.”

Alex has worked at the plant for two years. He said the line speed was “really fast,” and that managers would speed up the line so workers would not get paid for their full eight hours.

“They’re expecting quality products, but some, like white bone, take some time. You have to put more effort into that, and it takes training to do this. You have to go fast, and sometimes you don’t get it right the first time. You have to do it multiple times, it gets stuck, and then your hand starts to hurt. And the injury risk goes up the faster you work.

“The most important tool we have are our knives, and when we are forced to work with an old or dull one and can’t get it sharpened, it sucks.”

Alex, like every worker the WSWS spoke to on the picket line, rejected the insulting 60-cent initial raise proposed by the company, which does not even keep pace with inflation.

“I don’t like the offer,” he said. “It doesn’t feel like we are going to get much. I don’t know if you guys heard, but JBS is making a lot more money recently. They don’t want to pay us.”

“How can JBS go and pay for stadiums, donate to politicians, and then say there is no money for us?” he said.

Last January, Pilgrim’s Pride, one of the largest poultry processors in the United States and a subsidiary of JBS, made a \$5 million “donation” to Donald Trump’s 2025 inauguration committee, the largest contribution of any company.

Six months after the bribe, JBS began publicly trading on the New York Stock Exchange. The company had sought regulatory approval from the Securities and Exchange Commission for more than a decade, but was only approved last year, following the contribution to Trump. The delay in approval was due in part to the outright corruption of Joesley and Wesley Batista, brothers and the largest shareholders in JBS. The billionaires were jailed for six months in 2017 and 2018 after admitting to bribing nearly 1,900 politicians in Brazil.

United Food and Commercial Workers Local 7, which claims to represent some 3,800 workers at the plant, previously indicated that the strike would last only two weeks.

Alex said he had not received any update on negotiations between the union and the company:

“Nothing yet. They are just having a few conferences.”

Turning to attacks on immigrants, Alex refuted characterizations that immigrants were “lazy” or stealing from native-born workers.

“I feel like we are mostly hard workers out here. A lot of Mexicans built the United States.”

Alex noted that JBS has plans to expand production in Mexico and that he would support other JBS workers going on strike in support of the Greeley workers.

“Absolutely, 100 percent,” Alex said, adding, “Even if they are smaller plants, if we are going through the same thing, we are going through the same thing. ... I’m all for it, everyone going on strike.”

On the war against Iran, Alex was clear: “I don’t stand for war. I don’t think the president should just decide to start bombing people. We should be united in peace.”



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