

JBS meatpacking workers return to work at Greeley, Colorado plant after UFCW sellout of strike

Dan Conway
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Workers at the JBS meatpacking plant in Greeley, Colorado returned to work Tuesday after the United Food and Commercial Workers suddenly canceled their powerful three-week strike without any progress at the bargaining table.

The Greeley JBS plant occupies a pivotal role in the food processing industry, processing more than 6 percent of all beef production in the United States. The industry is highly concentrated: Four conglomerates, including JBS, Tyson, Cargill and National Beef account for 85 percent of all beef sold in the United States. JBS and Tyson also dominate the chicken and pork industries, with the two alone accounting for more than 50 percent of all US chicken meat production. JBS and Tyson along with Smithfield and Hormel account for nearly 70 percent of the US pork market.

Workers at the Greeley beef plant receive abysmally low wages while safety procedures are routinely flouted at the plant. In the last six years alone, JBS has been fined for 184 health and safety-related offenses, 40 employment-related offenses and has been found to have violated 85 environmental regulations as well. Six workers died in the first year of the coronavirus pandemic and a seventh died in an industrial accident in 2021.

Despite such consistently high numbers, the majority of such incidents go unreported with workers often dealing with severe injuries and management maltreatment in silence.

During multiple visits to the picket line by *World Socialist Web Site* reporters, strikers relayed horror stories of their fellow workers losing limbs or suffering other devastating injuries. One young worker related how the skin on his hand was peeled away after getting caught in machinery, while another showed a terrible chemical burn on his skin.

Such incidents happen on a near daily basis, but management refuses to halt production to care for the injured workers. Line speeds are kept absurdly high to increase output. In order to maintain these speeds, workers are often denied bathroom breaks, with stories of workers soiling themselves on the line a common occurrence.

JBS was the largest single donor to Trump's second inaugural committee, giving half a million dollars to the would-be dictator. Their efforts were rewarded when US Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins announced waivers to individual plants in March 2025 allowing them to exceed regulated speeds. Rollins justified this with the lying claim that "extensive research has confirmed no direct link between processing speeds and workplace injuries."

The press release was accompanied by the announcement that the federal government's Food Safety and Inspection Service would no longer require plants to submit worker safety data, all but insuring that the resultant increase in worker injuries would be kept secret.

Before the strike, anger at the plant had been reaching a boiling point, with workers conducting impromptu line stoppages when the speed got too fast. When the strike vote was called in February, more than 99 percent of the plant's workers voted in favor. This was despite the fact that many of the workers are immigrant and faced retaliation from Trump's ICE Gestapo. Workers reported that agents had been seen driving around the voting site in unmarked vehicles.

The strike itself was the largest meatpacking strike in 60 years and the first large strike of US meatpacking workers since the Hormel strike of 1985-86. The UFCW bureaucracy at the time played a crucial role in betraying the striking meatpacking workers, placing the P-9 local in

receivership after members refused to certify a concessionary agreement with Hormel.

As with the bureaucrats in other unions, the UFCW officials have consistently worked in the decades since to either prevent strikes, or whenever that proved impossible, to isolate and shut them down as was the case in Greeley.

The Greeley strike was called after the union and JBS had reached a national agreement preventing union-sponsored sympathy strikes among the 14 plants covered in the agreement, which together employed 26,000 meatpacking workers. This included the JBS meatpacking plant in Cactus, Texas, which went on to process diverted beef from Greeley during the strike, forcing Texas meatpacking workers to scab on their brothers and sisters in Colorado.

UFCW Local 7, which covers grocery and agricultural workers across the greater Colorado and Wyoming regions including the Swift Beef plant, had also shut down a powerful strike of Colorado grocery workers at the King Soopers and Safeway chains last year.

At the Greeley plant, Local 7 even allowed scabs to cross picket lines in the midst of the strike so that some production could be kept going and to make the plant ready for workers once the union called off the strike. Asked by WWSW reporters about why scabs were being allowed into the plant without resistance, one UFCW official replied that they were “not scabs but ‘replacement workers.’”

Despite these efforts, the Greeley strike put workers in a powerful position. US cattle numbers had already hit a 75-year low prior to the strike and efforts to divert product and keep production running at the plant only resulted in recouping a small fraction of its normal output.

According to Jennifer Martin at Colorado State University’s animal sciences department, an extended strike in Greeley threatened to disrupt the industry.

As a result of the UFCW’s sudden surrender, however, JBS has not improved its meager offer by a single cent, staying at the initial 60 cent per hour increase the first year followed by 30 percent in the next two years of the contract. Many workers on the picket lines believe that even these small amounts will largely be absorbed by increased healthcare costs. This is from a company that made \$415 million in profits in the fourth quarter of 2025 and has an overall market capitalization of \$18.7 billion.

Dr. Kishore Kulkarni, a professor of economics at Metropolitan State University of Denver specializing in

labor relations, noted that JBS essentially now has all the cards in their favor when negotiations resume Thursday.

“I think they [JBS] will probably change the offer if labor comes very close to the offer,” Kulkarni told Denver7 news.

Greeley workers should be under no illusions that a major sellout agreement is underway which will address none of their concerns for decent compensation or safe conditions. The UFCW bureaucracy’s primary concern is to maintain their highly paid conditions and perks as payment received for successfully policing their own members. Local 7 president Kim Cordova herself made nearly \$250,000 in 2024, nearly six times the salary of a typical Swift worker and her compensation has doubtless increased since.

Instead, Greeley workers will only be able to take the struggle forward if they form their own rank-and-file committees independent of the bankrupt union apparatus. The strike itself has found broad support including that of healthcare workers in Greeley who issued their own statement supporting the Swift workers’ struggle. Similarly, JBS workers in Brazil issued statements of support last month.

The UFCW called off the Swift plant strike not due to any weakness but because of its strength. It had the potential to join a growing movement of the working class against widening social inequality and also the drive towards dictatorship and war.

Greeley workers must in fact continue the struggle on their own terms and form their own rank-and-file committees to carry it forward. It deserves the active organizational support of workers throughout the agricultural industry and beyond. The *World Socialist Web Site* encourages workers to contact us for information on either joining a rank-and-file committee or forming one of their own. For more information, click here.



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