

After Greeley betrayal, UFCW blocks new strike action by Denver, Colorado meatpacking workers

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11 May 2026

Less than three weeks after United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 7 called off the powerful strike of meatpacking workers at the JBS meat processing plant in Greeley, Colorado leading to a concessionary contract weeks later, meatpacking workers at the JBS beef and pork plant in nearby Denver voted April 27 to authorize strike action. Ninety-seven percent of the plant's 300 workers voted in favor.

The Greeley JBS plant is responsible for nearly 8 percent of all US beef processing, while the Denver facility processes beef and pork for Kroger grocery stores across the Southwest. These include King Soopers and City Market in Colorado, Fry's Food and Drug Stores in Arizona, Smith's in Utah, Nevada, New Mexico and Arizona and Ralphs and Food 4 Less in Southern California.

The last contract at the Denver facility expired in September 2025 with Local 7 reaching the latest of several extension agreements with JBS allowing workers to strike on 72 hours notice after an authorization vote.

"We're evaluating their [JBS'] behavior if they're actually going to come to the [bargaining] table," said Kim Cordova, Local 7 president. "Once we give that 72-hour notice, then the no-strike clause in that agreement is gone. We already have strike authorization vote from the workers and from the members. And so once that provision in our collective bargaining agreement is no longer in effect, we have the ability to engage in a work stoppage."

As mentioned previously, however, after the initial contract expired in September 2025, the union reached multiple rolling contract extensions with the company

at the Denver plant often on a month-to-month and even week-to-week basis. Given this, it is highly likely that there were multiple periods in which pro-corporate "no strike" clauses were not in effect and preparations could certainly have been made to conduct a solidarity strike with Greeley workers.

Local 7 officials, however, did nothing to mobilize Denver workers in support of their brothers and sisters or even inform them that the strike was taking place. This was duplicated at Local 7 workplaces across the Colorado and Wyoming regions.

The initiation of the latest contract extensions is in fact intended to give JBS a stronger hand in negotiations and thus stifle the Denver workers' struggle.

This is of a piece with the UFCW's strategy in both the Greeley strike and the King Soopers and Safeway grocery workers strikes before it last year. The union's overriding concern is not the defense of workers but the companies' profits, which must remain unimpeded throughout.

This was precisely why the UFCW did nothing to mobilize its membership in Cactus, Texas after JBS diverted cattle there from the Greeley plant. At the same time, union officials allowed scab labor, whom they euphemistically referred to as "replacement workers," to continue plant operations in Greeley while 3,000 members were manning picket lines.

Then as now, the critical task for meatpacking workers in JBS and beyond is to form their own independent rank-and-file committees, breaking the stranglehold of the union and taking the struggle into their own hands.

To add insult to injury, nearly three weeks after the

Denver vote passed and even after strike registration was held on May 2 indicating that an actual work stoppage was imminent, UFCW International has thus far refused to sanction the strike. According to a Local 7 press release, the International is making its sanction contingent upon additional bargaining sessions with JBS. However, given the fact that JBS has stonewalled and delayed during the few sessions it has attended, the true intent of withholding sanction is effectively to disregard the workers' strike authorization vote.

These actions have led to widespread outrage among rank-and-file workers, who have decried the open collusion between the union and management.

One worker on the UFCW's subreddit noted with disgust the recent news that UFCW international bureaucrats had been photographed smiling with JBS executives in Brazil. "They are in bed with JBS. After seeing that you can't tell me UFCW international isn't dirty! Using our dues to fly to Brazil! Give me a break."

Sentiment for independent action is also growing on social media with many expressing a desire to break with the union apparatus and one worker noting that despite the union's obstructionism, the workers "should just strike anyways."

Regardless of the UFCW officials' effort to contain and block the Denver strike, the workers' authorization vote reveals a powerful consensus in the rank and file for a fight against abysmal working conditions, including low pay and hazardous, life-threatening work environments. The union's actions are in fact a desperate attempt to prevent workers' opposition from spiraling out of its control and posing a challenge to not only the profit imperatives of the large conglomerates but the political setup as a whole committed to war, austerity and political reaction.

The strike in Greeley ultimately failed to achieve significant gains for workers with below-inflation raises of 70 cents per hour in the first year and 40 cents per hour in the second and third years of the contract along with no meaningful provisions on plant safety. Nevertheless, the walkout was a powerful demonstration of the militancy and determination of workers, including immigrants from Somalia, Haiti, Guatemala, Mexico, Cambodia, and other countries who courageously defied the ICE gestapo and potential deportation.

There is no doubt that the UFCW is extremely concerned that should the Denver workers go out on strike, they would draw lessons from the Greeley and make it more difficult for the union bureaucracy to shove a similar concessionary contract down workers' throats. Moreover, it would likely rekindle discontent at the Greeley plant itself which the union seeks to keep quiet.

Militant precedents are being set by workers in the US and internationally who are refusing to accept any more rotten contracts issued by management in collusion with the unions. These include Nexteer auto parts workers in Saginaw, Michigan, who last month rejected a concessionary TA reached between the company and the United Auto Workers by 96 percent. Miners in Türkiye launched a march across the country drawing in broad layers of the working class in defiance of the Erdogan government to win their demands.

In both cases, the initiative sprung independently from the rank and file. Meatpacking workers in Denver and beyond can only hope to achieve their aims through similar initiatives, above all, by forming rank-and-file committees in opposition to the union bureaucracy.

Workers can only fight against poverty wages and unsafe conditions by taking up the fight for rank-and-file committees with even greater urgency. For information on forming or joining a rank-and-file committee, click here.



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