

Philadelphia hotel workers launch strike

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Philadelphia hotel workers with UNITE HERE Local 274 launched a strike Sunday, walking off the job at several major downtown hotels. The action follows months of stalled contract negotiations over wages, staffing and healthcare.

The strike involves about 280 workers at two downtown Philadelphia hotels and comes amid a massive municipal crisis within Philadelphia and the state of Pennsylvania. At the national level, the Trump administration has waged war on the population through the deployment of the National Guard to Portland, Chicago and other cities on the transparently false claim of combating “left-wing terrorism.”

As with other municipalities, Philadelphia is suffering from systematic underfunding of its public schools and transportation services, among other things. The state is three months overdue for its fiscal year 2026 budget, while the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) and the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) remain underfunded to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars.

It comes a little under three months since the powerful 9,000-member strong strike of municipal workers shut down the city’s services. That strike encountered mass public support within the working class but was ended by the AFSCME trade union apparatus when it was at its most powerful. Philadelphia public school teachers voted last summer to strike by 94 percent, but the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers announced a sellout tentative agreement days before the teachers’ contract expired.

No sooner had the teachers’ vote concluded than the SDP announced plans to shutter dozens of schools, placing teachers and students alike in precarious conditions.

Temple Health nurses in the Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals (PASNAP) are set to strike on October 13 if no contract is reached, and workers in SEPTA are set to have their contract expire. Next month, the contract for 5,000 Philadelphia transit workers with the Transport Workers Union Local 234 is

set to expire.

The hotel strike involves housekeepers, cooks, bartenders and front desk staff. They are demanding significant wage increases including a \$12 raise over three years for non-tipped workers, better pensions, expanded healthcare coverage and improved staffing levels. In Philadelphia, the average hourly pay for hotel workers is around \$22, while their annual compensation is roughly \$45,760 for full-time workers.

This comes in far under the real cost of living in the city, which is estimated to be at around \$50,000 to \$55,000 a year before taxes to cover essentials like rent, utilities, food, transportation and personal expenses. Monthly costs excluding rent range from \$1,200 to \$1,600, while the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment is about \$1,300 to \$1,700 per month.

Working conditions include long hours, overwork, understaffing, physical strain and having to do multiple jobs at once. Contract negotiations have been ongoing since spring, with current contracts expired since last year, and have been extended recently.

The union says hotel management companies have not offered satisfactory proposals despite rising inflation and an expected surge in tourism for major 2026 events like the FIFA World Cup.

According to City and State Pennsylvania, “As the nation approaches 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence … the Keystone State will be at the forefront of celebrations commemorating the revolutionary document’s 250th anniversary.” The city of Philadelphia will host several major sports events in the next year, including the “MLB All-Star Game, the PGA Championship, and the first and second rounds of the NCAA Men’s Basketball tournament.” In total, the state and city expect “a historic influx of visitors and dollars throughout the year.”

Hospitality workers hold immense leverage under these conditions.

The strike brings these workers up against the most powerful real estate firms in the world, as well as major

supporters of the Trump administration.

Hotel management at the Sheraton Philadelphia Downtown, run by Aimbridge Hospitality, has been largely silent in public about the negotiations and has not presented offers meeting workers' needs. Meanwhile, the Hampton Inn Center City is owned by Blackstone's BREIT real estate trust, Blackstone Incorporated, an alternative asset management firm.

Stephen Schwarzman, Blackstone's CEO, is a prominent supporter of the fascist President Donald Trump and of his efforts to establish a presidential dictatorship in the United States. The interests of the corporate oligarchy is what is fundamentally driving Trump's dictatorial actions.

Any struggle against these conditions necessarily brings the working class against the combined forces of management and the state. This also includes the forces of the Democratic Party and trade union apparatus. Local 274, with over 4,000 members, is attempting to continue the betrayal of Philadelphia workers with its misleadership.

The union has only mobilized a few hundred workers at the two locations. UNITE HERE Local 274 has assets worth over \$2.4 million, which could provide all of its striking members with strike pay at or greater than their \$880 per week they earn working in the Hampton and Sheraton hotels for over two months. As a national union, UNITE HERE possesses over \$238 million total assets.

Rather than put these resources to use, its leaders are stringing their 280 striking members out on poverty-level strike benefits. On Sunday, the union paraded leaders of local unions to spout empty slogans. Among them was AFSCME District Council 33 leader Greg Boulware, who declared that members should "stand together and be strong."

Any legitimate workers leader would not let Boulware come within a mile of their picket lines. Boulware and the leaders from the AFSCME municipal union sold their members out in July when they briefly struck and shut down the city services.

As support for the strike grew, leading to the near-cancellation of the city's July 4 celebrations, AFSCME concluded a sellout offer with the city's Democratic Party leadership. This sellout offer met none of their demands and gave them a pay raise only 1 percent more than the contract offer they previously rejected.

At the time, Boulware declared, "we felt our clock was running out." Boulware's "we" refers to the union leadership's ability to contain the workers' momentum,

choosing to sell them out rather than risk a rupture with the city's political establishment, of which it is a part.

The Philadelphia Workers Rank-and-File Strike Committee was formed by striking workers amid the DC 33 struggle to oppose the betrayal of its leadership and expand the strike to other sections of the city's working class. It stated at the time: "The actions of AFSCME are the rule, not the exception. The more power that workers show and the greater the possibility for a broader struggle, the more shamelessly the union apparatus intervenes to isolate, demoralize and ultimately betray the movement."

This has since been proven again and again in Philadelphia and beyond. With a fight against both poverty and dictatorship at hand, it is crucial that workers learn from these experiences, as they have been examined and analyzed by the Philadelphia Workers Rank-and-File Strike Committee and the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Workers must take the initiative to develop their own organizations to resist the coming sellouts of their struggle while fighting to connect them to the broader movement of the working class. Rank-and-file committees must take up the fight against exploitation, the shredding of social services and the corporate oligarchy's attempts to build a dictatorship in its effort to contain the class struggle.

Local 274 workers must unite with these workers and build the Philadelphia Workers Rank-and-File Strike Committee as the vehicle to oppose exploitation, fascism, war and spread their strike beyond the limits which the official union apparatus is allowing.



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