

Workers at Hersheypark theme park in Pennsylvania voting to strike

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Workers at Hersheypark in Hershey, Pennsylvania, are voting this week on whether to strike against the amusement park management and its parent company, The Hershey Company.

More than 200 members of Chocolate Workers Local 464—including ride and auto mechanics, welders, carpenters, central plant operators, electricians, HVAC technicians, laborers, machinists, plumbers, painters and sign artists—have rejected multiple contract offers, including management’s final offer on May 7. This sets the stage for a potential strike that could shut down Hersheypark, the Giant Center and the Hotel Hershey at the beginning of the summer season.

Hershey workers are demanding higher wages, improved pay differentials for night, weekend, and early-morning shifts and affordable healthcare plans. According to workers, rising insurance costs could consume as much as 60 percent of any wage increase. Management is also attempting to lower starting wages for maintenance workers and restructure skilled trades into a more casualized labor force.

Economic pressures are driving workers into struggle. Trump’s criminal war against Iran and the subsequent blockades of the narrow Strait of Hormuz has also been a war on working people, driving gas prices to nearly \$5 per gallon, increasing the cost of food and basic goods and cutting into workers’ disposable income.

A movement against the rise in the cost of living is underway among workers in hospitality and entertainment. In October 2025, Philadelphia hotel workers launched a strike against some of the world’s most powerful real estate giants, while Writers Guild members fought a union bureaucracy that imposed a sellout contract in April—slashing healthcare and ignoring AI threats. These struggles are also taking place worldwide: theater and entertainment workers in

Greece, hospitality staff at London bars and hotels and Telugu film industry workers in India in late 2025 and into early 2026. In each instance, workers have walked out over pay and job conditions.

Hershey workers are in a strong position to win their demands. The strike vote comes just a week before Hersheypark plans to open for seven days a week to maximize profiteering during the warmer months. A strike would significantly impact Hershey’s bottom line, potentially shutting down operations over Memorial Day weekend and the start of the summer season. The water park is scheduled to open on May 23, while the Giant Center is hosting comedian Nate Bargatze on May 16, singer Khalid on May 23 and Australian pop rock band 5 Seconds of Summer on May 31.

Workers are essential for Hersheypark’s continued operation and to ensure visitor safety. “I used to work at Hersheypark. First as a ride operator, then ride lead, then dry gulch engineer,” said one commenter on social media. “I would put the union workers and their skilled trades up against the best in the world. They are some of the smartest people I had the pleasure to work with,” they added.

Each worker holds specialized qualifications tied to specific rides and systems, yet management suggests that outside contractors could replace them. Rides require daily inspection, the park must be cleaned and maintained, and extensive preparation is completed before guests arrive. Emergency response cannot function without these workers, who are the first to act in critical situations.

Despite management’s claims that there is no money available to improve wages, benefits and job security, Hershey remains one of the most profitable companies in the United States and the world. The Hershey

Company, a separate entity, reported \$11.693 billion in revenue in 2025, with fourth-quarter operating profits of \$444.9 million. The Hershey Trust Company holds a controlling stake in both organizations.

Hersheypark itself draws more than 3 million visitors annually and generates several hundred million dollars in revenue each year, with profits in the tens of millions. It is part of Hershey Entertainment and Resorts, which also includes The Hotel Hershey, Hershey Lodge, Hershey Country Club, the Hershey Bears, Hershey Theatre and ZooAmerica.

While the more than 200 members of Local 464 have shown determination in rejecting multiple contract proposals, a major obstacle remains: the stifling bureaucracy of the union. Workers have pointed to previous contracts that failed to keep pace with rising living costs, resulting in declining real wages and reduced benefits. Past negotiations have prioritized company profitability over workers' needs, setting the stage for the current dispute.

A 60-day contract extension in March allowed management, along with union leadership, to peel off a section of the workforce at the Hershey Lodge and Hershey Country Club, who accepted a revised agreement.

For its part, the company is preparing to open the park as scheduled, potentially positioning itself to continue operations with strikebreakers in the event of a strike, while maintaining a cooperative posture with union negotiators.

“We are not going to speculate on outcomes, but we can confirm that our opening plans are proceeding on schedule,” stated Hersheypark spokesperson Quinn Bryner, who emphasized the corporation’s “longstanding relationship with our union-represented team members,” a reference to the union leadership’s shared interest in maintaining high profits for the company.

Hershey workers now face a decisive moment. They should vote to strike and must prepare for a historic job action. The determination to fight, expressed in the rejections of previous sellout offers, must be parlayed into the organizing of a rank-and-file committee beholden only to the membership and independent of the pro-company union bureaucracy. It should establish lines of communication with both non-union workers at the park and rank-and-file union members in the

surrounding area to maximize the impact of their work stoppage.

Hershey has a proud and complex history of labor struggle. In 1937, workers at the Hershey plant organized against Milton Hershey’s paternalistic labor system, speedups and working conditions. They carried out a sit-down strike and affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations’ Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers. The strike, occurring at a high point of working class militancy during the Great Depression, ultimately contributed to union recognition at Hershey under what is now the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers (BCTGM) union.

Since then, BCTGM has become a reliable tool of corporations and the state, as have other bureaucratic organizations that once called themselves labor unions. In mid-2021, 600 Frito-Lay workers in Topeka went on strike and rejected four consecutive sellout deals, only for the BCTGM to ultimately push through an agreement while paying workers a paltry \$105 a week in strike benefits. Then in August–September 2021, Nabisco workers struck across five states, and the BCTGM colluded with management to isolate the strikes, rushing through a sellout vote giving workers less than an hour to read the contract before casting a ballot.

Workers need to learn these historical lessons as they prepare for their own struggle against the united front of management, the company and their stooges in the union. The WSWS will assist workers in their fight to organize and win their demands.



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