

Hersheypark workers in Pennsylvania reject 4th tentative agreement, vote to strike

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10 June 2026

On Wednesday, June 3, over 200 skilled trades workers at the Hersheypark theme park and luxury resort in Hershey, Pennsylvania, voted down a fourth tentative agreement offered by management and the Chocolate Workers Local 464 bargaining committee. Following the rejection, over 500 Local 464 members across Hersheypark, the Giant Center and Hotel Hershey voted to authorize a strike. A walkout could shut down operations amid the busy opening weeks of summer.

Originally, the skilled trades workers had been scheduled to authorize a strike in mid-May, following rejection of one of the \$1 billion corporation's "final offers." No sooner was that offer defeated than management and the union—affiliated with the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers (BCTGM)—returned with another proposal, keeping workers on the job while attempting to ram through yet another sellout agreement. It was only after the fourth rejection that Local 464 officials felt compelled to call a strike authorization vote at all and only then to save face.

The consecutive rejections and strike authorization reflect a deepening mood of resistance and militancy among workers in the United States and internationally. They come as 1,700 Nexteer auto parts workers in Saginaw, Michigan, have launched a rebellion against both management and the United Auto Workers union, rejecting three tentative agreements and authorizing strike action by 86 percent. That militancy, however, is being strangled by the UAW leaders, who have instructed workers to remain on the job indefinitely.

Nearby, American Axle workers in Three Rivers, Michigan, have launched strike action against low pay, the absence of sick days and years of concessions extracted by the UAW, even as the company has posted massive profits. In addition, Dana workers in Michigan, Ohio and Indiana have rejected union-backed contracts by more than 90 percent over the last week.

In a June 3 statement, the same day Hersheypark workers voted to strike, the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee—composed of workers from the shop floor determined to advance their struggle—declared: "We have rejected three contracts. We have voted to strike. We have made our position clear. From this point forward, the workers will become the authority."

As with other corporations and industries, Hershey management, the Local 464 bargaining committee and federal mediators introduced largely cosmetic changes with each successive tentative agreement. According to a local CBS affiliate, an "official federal labor mediator worked with the two parties to determine the tentative agreements, and the park says they were unanimously recommended for ratification by the union's bargaining committee."

In other words, Hersheypark workers are confronting a coordinated conspiracy against their living standards, directed from the state level downward through management and the trade union bureaucracy. According to a statement from Hershey Entertainment & Resorts, the union had not informed the company of any planned "work stoppage" and "operations continue normally."

Money has been shuffled around, and the proposed contract length extended from four to five years. The central issues, however, remain unresolved: Management continues to deny retroactive pay and meaningful increases in shift differentials; health insurance premiums remain prohibitively high; and the company has refused to address retirement benefits or job security.

Hersheypark workers are essential to the safety, maintenance and smooth operation of the resort complex. Without them, the millions of visitors who travel to the park for entertainment could neither be accommodated nor kept safe.

While Local 464 members are prepared to establish picket lines, the union bureaucracy is keeping workers on

the job without a contract. This delay serves management's interests, buying time to coordinate with federal mediators and force through another sellout while daily operations continue uninterrupted.

The time has come for Hersheypark workers to seize the initiative and go on the offensive against management and its accomplices in the union apparatus. While workers are prepared to withhold their most fundamental weapon—their labor power in strike action—the pro-company union bureaucracy is committing an act of deliberate sabotage that ultimately serves management's interests.

Workers should build a rank-and-file committee of militant members to prepare for strike action, elect a new bargaining committee directly accountable to the membership, and organize solidarity with non-union workers at the park, as well as rank-and-file members across other unions.

What has unfolded since the contract's expiration in mid-March makes this clear.

On March 15, the contract expired. Rather than strike, a 60-day extension was agreed to—a move that enabled management and the union leadership to divide the workforce, pushing a separate revised agreement through at the Hershey Lodge and Hershey Country Club.

On May 7, they voted down what management called its “last, best and final” offer. With Hershey preparing to operate seven days a week through the Memorial Day holiday weekend, a strike at that moment would have significantly disrupted operations and increased pressure on the company by directly hitting its bottom line. The union ensured that did not happen.

The most recent vote was conducted over three days, June 1 through 3, with different sections of the workforce voting in separate time blocks. This staggered process was plainly designed to dilute unified opposition and improve management's chances of securing ratification. Despite it, workers rejected the offer a fourth time and authorized a strike.

Hersheypark workers are not alone in confronting the brickwall of the apparatus. The BCTGM brings to this struggle a long train of betrayals. In mid-2021, 600 Frito-Lay workers in Topeka, Kansas, struck and rejected four sellout agreements, but the BCTGM pushed through a contract while paying just \$105 a week in strike benefits. “The union,” a striking worker told the *World Socialist Web Site* at the time, “literally starved us into accepting the latest offer.”

In August–September 2021, Nabisco workers struck

across five states. The BCTGM colluded with management to isolate the walkouts, rushing through a sellout vote that gave workers less than an hour to read the contract before balloting.

The relationship between the BCTGM bureaucracy—with President Anthony Shelton drawing \$364,966 per year to deliver sellout agreements to his members—and the two major political parties is what separates these institutions from the rank and file. Their material interests make them instruments of management and capitalism, not of workers' power or solidarity.

A strike would win mass support. A former coworker posted on social media following the latest rejection: “The Hershey Trust is sitting on how many billions? I worked with those guys for two seasons. They deserve every penny.”

Another wrote: “Remember, these are skilled maintenance workers responsible for keeping dangerous rides safe. They are the unseen workers behind every ‘fun day.’ Many pay out of pocket to maintain certifications and stay trained on new systems while maintaining aging equipment. One mistake can cost lives. They deserve respect and proper compensation.”

A third captured the logic of profit under capitalism: “It's time Hershey is knocked off the pedestal it has built. Hershey Entertainment and the Hershey Company are among the greediest corporations in the country. Too much profit goes to the top instead of the workers who generate it.”

Only through a rebellion of the rank and file can workers assert control over their struggle and confront both management and the institutional structures designed to defend the super-wealthy. This truth is as urgent today as in any previous period of labor history. Hershey has a long tradition of labor struggle that should serve as an inspiration for the battles now unfolding.

The WSWS and International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) will aid and organize workers for the fight ahead. To get more information about building a rank-and-file committee, fill out the form below.



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