

Philadelphia Sheraton hotel workers' union calls off strike days ahead of busy July 4 holiday

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On June 28, union officials from UNITE HERE Local 274 announced an end to a nine-day strike at the Sheraton Philadelphia Downtown hotel following a tentative agreement (TA). The agreement came just in time for the massive July 4 tourism rush to the city.

Workers had only days to vote on the TA. According to local sources, the contract was ratified on Monday, June 29, and workers were returning to their jobs on Wednesday, July 1.

The workers had been without a contract since May 2024, laboring under extensions while inflation and housing costs surged. The TA would bring Sheraton workers “up to the standard” already won at five other unionized Center City hotels: a path to \$30 per hour for non-tipped workers by January 2028, a 15-room daily quota for housekeepers, 18 percent banquet gratuity and improved pensions and family health coverage.

The hotel workers first walked out in October 2025, alongside roughly 190 workers at the Sheraton and Hampton Inn Center City, part of a broader struggle involving nearly 4,000 Local 274 members across eight hotels. That four-day strike led to Hampton Inn and other properties to adopt a new citywide standard, but Sheraton held out. Sheraton’s owners, Cambridge Landmark, calculated that they could absorb a brief stoppage and continue profiting from a packed 2026 events calendar—FIFA World Cup matches, America 250 celebrations, the MLB All-Star Game—without conceding immediately.

In June, Sheraton workers struck again, with 98 percent of members authorizing the walkout. This time it coincided with the hotel’s busiest season and a major World Cup match in the city. The deal, reached as Philadelphia prepares to mark the 250th anniversary of

the American Revolution, allows the largest unionized hotel in the city to resume operations for the holiday weekend and the flood of visitors to “America’s birthplace.”

Union leaders quickly wound down the strike and treated the membership’s acceptance of the TA as a foregone conclusion even while the so-called “industry standard” embodied in the agreement masks the underlying reality.

Even at \$30 an hour, a full-time worker earns about \$62,000 a year before taxes—only modestly above the roughly \$48,000 “living wage” benchmark in the city of Philadelphia. A 2024 analysis found a “comfortable” income for a single adult without children in the city around \$92,700 annually, roughly \$44.58 an hour, well above what a hospitality worker would make under the current TA.

Furthermore, the projected raise is not immediate; it phases in over two-and-a-half years, while rents and food prices are rising now. Many hotel workers lack guaranteed full-time hours, face seasonal layoffs and must piece together multiple jobs. Under these conditions, \$30 an hour remains near-poverty pay for workers supporting children or other dependents.

The decision to end the strike well in advance of the holiday weekend reflects the union’s institutional ties to the Democratic Party and its role in defending capitalism. At the international level, UNITE HERE President Gwen Mills received about \$204,308 in compensation, with other top officers such as senior HR Director John McCaffrey and an international vice president in the \$179,000–\$183,000 range.

As reflected in the hotel workers’ minor wage increases and other concessions, UNITE HERE and the

rest of the trade union apparatus have been critical to maintaining the status quo in the city and throughout the region. July 1 marks one year since the start of the powerful Philadelphia municipal workers strike in 2025. Nearly 9,000 AFSCME District Council 33 members—trash collectors, 911 dispatchers, street pavers and other city workers—launched the largest municipal strike in almost four decades, demanding 8 percent annual raises over three years, full healthcare coverage and real cost-of-living protections.

After eight days, AFSCME shut down the strike and rammed through a tentative agreement for a miserly 9 percent wage increase over three years—just one percentage point more than the city’s initial offer.

The municipal workers had immense leverage and mass support, but the union apparatus conspired to prevent a broader movement. UNITE HERE Local 274, for its part, kept its members working through July 2025, even though their own hotel contracts had expired in May 2024. The union chose not to link tens of thousands of hotel and restaurant workers to the municipal strike, ensuring that the potential for a genuine citywide offensive against austerity was never realized.

The only organization that advanced such a perspective was the Philadelphia Workers Rank-and-File Strike Committee, formed during the municipal strike out of opposition to AFSCME’s betrayal. The committee urged fellow municipal workers to “renew the strike immediately and expand it to include transit workers, white-collar employees and all other sections of the working class in Philadelphia.”

It stated that AFSCME officials were “working hand in hand with the city to prevent the strike from developing into a broader fight against inequality and the Democratic Party” and that the latter “are doing nothing to oppose [President Trump] because they too represent the corporate oligarchy. Both parties are in full agreement on bleeding the working class dry to fund Wall Street and war.”

The Sheraton strike confirms the central lesson of last year’s municipal struggle: So long as workers remain confined within the framework of the official unions and the Democratic Party, every fight will end with “industry standards” and “fair, fiscally responsible” agreements that leave poverty wages and intolerable living conditions fundamentally untouched.

Real progress will require the construction of rank-and-file committees, independent of the union apparatus and the conscious unification of isolated workplace struggles into a mass political movement of the working class against capitalism itself.



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