


ASSHOLE DISNEY WITHHOLDS BONUSES AS UNION WORKERS PROTEST POVERTY WAGES

DISNEY HAS SPENT THE LAST 10 YEARS BRIBING POLITICIANS, OFFENDING EVERYONE, HIDING STAFF WHO WERE PEDO'S AND JUST BEING BAD GUYS

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Disney World workers demonstrate at the entrance to Disney Springs for living wage (Photo by Michael Sainato)

Hundreds of Disney World workers marched more than a mile on March 23 to the entrance to Disney Springs, an entertainment and shopping complex on Disney property.

The protesters – including hospitality and housekeeping workers, custodians, ride operators, and cast members– handed out picket signs and balloons with “End Disney Poverty” stamped on them. They chanted, “We work, we sweat, put a raise on our check.”

It was the latest sign of a rift between labor and management at the “Happiest Place on Earth,” with unionized workers in Florida and California alleging that Disney pays them poverty wages.

In response to the unions rejecting Disney’s initial offer, Disney withheld bonuses up to \$1,000 from 41,000 union employees in Florida and California under the condition they accept the company’s wage proposal by August 31 or forfeit the bonuses entirely.

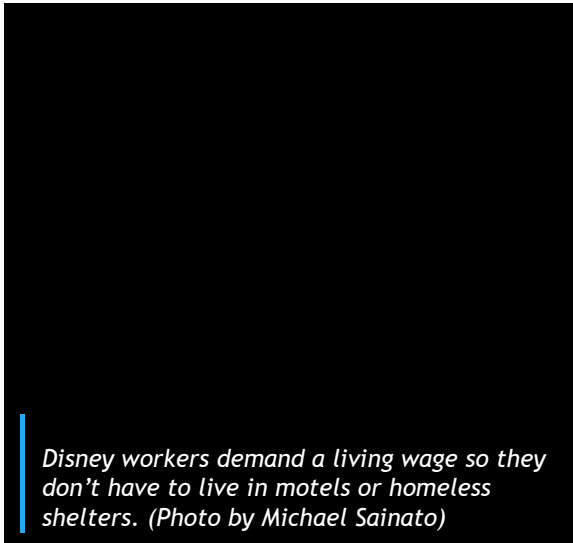
The unions jointly filed a federal charge with the Department of Labor against Disney over the withheld bonuses. (These are the bonuses the company publicly announced were tied to the Republican tax cut package that passed last year.)

Disney employees were granted anonymity to speak because they fear losing their jobs if management becomes aware of their participation or support for protests.

“We need a living wage. We need to get people out of homeless shelters and hotels. People can’t afford to live day to day,” one Disney employee at the protest said. “There are so many people not doing well, who work for Disney. We feel we deserve the raise and the bonus we all are fighting for.”

She added, “I love my job, but I don’t make enough. In order to live month to month, I have to work six days a week, so I only have one day off and I’m by myself. Thousands of people with families can’t make ends meet.”

Carissa Boudreau, a 21-year-old who has worked on Disney attractions for over two years, said the physical strain from her job has forced her to see several doctors and specialists, adding to the financial stress imposed on her by her low wages.



“I don’t even have a place yet of my own, and my car I use to get to work is starting to wear,” Boudreau shared. “Gas only gets pricier, and when my car does break, I’ll need to get a new one ASAP. I’m very scared of what might happen when I need to pay the \$50 to \$150 medical bills on top of rent and a car payment each month.”

When she started working at Disney, Boudreau was only paid \$9.50 an hour before taxes and worked up to 60 hours a week for months at a time, even though she was technically a part-time employee and didn’t receive health insurance.

Long-term Disney employees say they haven’t fared any better. As Mike Beaver shared, he worked in Tomorrowland in Disney World’s Magic Kingdom for 17 years. When he started, the minimum wage was \$6.35 an hour. Today, it is only \$10 an hour. Beaver makes only \$13.02 an hour.

“I’ve lived in a motel for over two years and nine months,” Beaver explained., It is a room he shares with another Disney employee.

In 2008, his 1989 Pontiac Sunbird broke down, and he has not been able to afford another car since. “I have to eat out a lot living in a motel,” he said. “I see cast members at work with no food when they go on their breaks.”

Motel living seems common among workers. A Disney employee said she currently shares a motel room with her entire family.

“The price of [a] motel is expensive itself. It’s not like living in your own home. There’s only one room everybody shares,” she added. “I have to work at least 50 hours a week and don’t get a lot of time to spend with my family. Disney wants you to make magic for the guests, but they don’t give magic to the cast members.”

Another employee said he lived in a motel for four months while working for Disney.

“I enjoy my job. I enjoy the people I work with. What I don’t enjoy is a Fortune 500 company deliberately keeping all our wages so low my friends have to live in cheap motels and eat off the dollar menu at McDonald’s,” said Adam Beaton, a cast member at Disney World. “It’s a vicious circle. You pay so much in rent that you aren’t really able to save enough for a down payment to get into an apartment. I had to work like a crazy person for a whole month—open to close six days a week—to be able to get out of there. So that was about 65 to 70 hours a week.”

Earlier this month, a former custodian at Disneyland named Vanessa Munoz wrote a Facebook post about another employee who went missing in late

2016 and was found dead a month later in the car, where she had been living out of in a gym parking lot.

“She didn’t have enough money to get her own place and my heart broke because all she did was give and give,” Munoz wrote. “Never once did she complain. But behind that smile and ‘good morning, darling’ lived a whole different person. A woman struggling and working [eight-hour] shifts for six days for a company that didn’t even bother helping with flower arrangements.”

Christopher Buck, another custodial worker, remembered her in an interview with *OC Weekly*, saying, “She was a hard worker and a sweetheart. We miss her.”

In an email, Munoz told Shadowproof, “Thousands of people give up so much to make someone’s day special. We put our life on hold for a day and play a part to make memories for families who come visit this place.”

“We are the main reason why people come back to visit Disney,” another employee declared. He said he’s only been given a 50-cent raise in his nine-year career. “We work hard 24/7 to keep the magic alive, to make this the happiest place on the planet, but we don’t see it back to us.”

The collection of unions representing 38,000 Disney World employees are asking for the \$10 minimum wage at the Florida park to be upped to \$15, but management has only consented to a \$0.50 annual bump—a proposal 93 percent of union members *rejected in a December vote*. Negotiations restarted last month, but so far Disney has not budged.

On the west coast, Disneyland workers face a similar struggle over wages. A February *union report* showed that of 5,000 union employees in the California park, 85 percent earn less than \$15 an hour, 11 percent have been homeless or not had a place of their own over the past two years, and 73 percent do not earn enough to pay rent, food, and gas.

The report noted, “In the decade from 2007-2016, Disneyland’s attendance grew 21 percent, ticket prices grew 59 percent, and revenue grew 98 percent,” and full-time Disney employees generate over \$144,000 in annual revenue for the company.

Disney *disputed* the survey’s findings to the Los Angeles Times and claimed the average pay at Disneyland is nearly \$18 an hour, but Peter Dreier, a professor at Occidental College and the lead author of the report, pushed back on Disneyland’s claim.

“Notice they’re not denying the problems we identified in the report. There are people who can’t make ends meet, who are homeless, who can’t afford health

insurance. They are just trying to divert attention,” argued Dreier. “The report we did is based on a survey of 17,000 unionized workers out of the 30,000 employees at Disneyland.”

“Regarding the figures they are using, on the Disneyland campus there is an office building with executives. So if you include those and average management-level people, then it’s going to raise the average,” Dreier added.

In southern California, an alliance of unions is backing a ballot measure in the city of Anaheim to force large employers like Disneyland to pay at least \$15 an hour, and increase it until it reaches \$18 by 2022.

That kind of legislative fix isn’t possible in Florida, according to union leader Jeremy Haicken, because the Disney property falls under its own municipality, the Reedy Creek Improvement District.

Haicken said there are no meetings currently scheduled between the two sides, adding, “We are more than willing to meet with Disney once they improve on their wage proposal.”

Meanwhile, the unions await a response from the National Labor Relations Board to the federal charges they filed against Disney for withholding bonuses as part of the wage negotiations.

Disney declined to comment for this story.

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