

# What Really Happened at Hershey

*Behind the fancy facade of the "model" town were things that caused the strike and the recent riot*

By Tom Humphries

**H**ERSHEY, PA.—Long considered the answer to the American workers' prayer, Hershey is unique among company towns. Its spotless streets, shaded lawns, and model homes have for years elicited admiring ohs and ahs from naïve tourists. It has a luxurious community center, four golf courses, an Indian museum, and an amusement park. There is a zoo—the biggest privately owned zoo in the world—in which the monkey cages are cooled in summer by electric fans. There is a dance pavilion in which no less a maestro than Rudy Vallée has played. Note, too, the opulent Hershey Hotel with flower-scented lobby and pseudo-Moorish decorations. The chocolate "dream town" also boasts a sports arena which is the largest monolithic concrete structure in the U.S.A. And the company's office building is ultra modern, vast stretches of glass, indirect lighting, splendid ventilation.

All these wonders of the twentieth century have served to nourish the myth that Chocolate King Milton Hershey is a great benefactor to his community and his employees. More than that: he is considered a great benefactor to the entire state of Pennsylvania. The Hershey Industrial School, which owns most of the stock in the chocolate factory, provides free education and housing to 800 orphan boys from various parts of the state.

The chocolate workers, however, have usually seen through the lovely fabric of legend which publicity agents have woven around this semi-feudal domain in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. They are quick to point out the advertising value of the "model town" hokum.

MR. HERSHEY never advertises through the medium of newspaper ads, radio programs, or billboards. More subtle is the way he publicizes his chocolate bars and cocoa through the activities of Henry ("Hershey Hurricane") Picard, the Hershey golf professional who plays in the national tournaments and carries off numerous prizes every year. Equally valuable as a publicity medium are the Hershey Bears Hockey Team—most sports writers oblige by the leaving the "e" out of "Bears"—which has just won the championship of the Eastern Amateur Hockey League. Recently, the Bears were suspended from the Amateur Athletic Union on the ground of professionalism. Hershey's players are mostly Canadians, imported to Hershey to play hockey and given purely formal employment in the town to create amateur standing for them.

The best advertising for the chocolate products, however, has been the town of Hershey

itself. Every year hundreds of thousands of tourists attend the hockey games, visit the factory, idle through the biggest privately owned zoo in the world. What they see is enhanced a thousand-fold in romantic glamour by feature stories in the newspapers and magazines which make the reader wish he lived in the paradise that is Hershey.

But of Hershey's unique attractions, the hockey games alone are of any interest to the employees of the chocolate plant. Obviously, company officials and foremen are the only ones in the factory who can afford to use the golf courses or attend the Rudy Vallée dances. And even among company officials there are few who can afford the luxuries of the six-dollars-a-day Hershey Hotel, which caters chiefly to central Pennsylvania's extreme upper crust. The Community Center, on the other hand, charges the usual Y.M.C.A. prices, but provides little more in the way of facilities. As for the famous zoo, the workers wish their own homes were as nicely laid out as the air-cooled monkey cages.

The fact is, Hershey workers share the dream of the great uninformed public. They, too, would like to live in Hershey. Actually, the rentals of the homes lining the town's snow-white pavements are so prohibitive that the overwhelming majority of the workers live outside of this alleged proletarian paradise in utterly uncelebrated towns like Swatara, Palmyra, and Hummelstown.

The industrial school for orphan boys seems to be good, but its real position in the Hershey set-up has seldom been completely understood. Few people know that many of the orphans graduating at eighteen go to work in the chocolate factory where they earn considerably less than was spent upon them while at school. Furthermore, the company jealously guards the fact that since the industrial school is a philanthropic institution, it secures tax exemp-

tions for all of its property—that is, for most of the town. The industrial school, in turn, is controlled by the Hershey Trust Co., where the aged would-be philanthropist Milton Hershey is chairman of the board. Untold are the millions which Hershey saves by this philanthropic system of tax evasion.

WITH FACTS such as these but little known, it was not until the C.I.O. came to Hershey that the bubble began to burst. Experienced organizers from the garment trades and the coal mines still wag their heads in astonishment and swear that never in all their lives did they see an organizing campaign so swiftly successful as the C.I.O. drive in Hershey.

Led by red-haired, jolly-faced John Loy and heavy-set Russell Behman, former collegiate and professional football star, the workers held a series of whirlwind meetings. Denied the use of buildings in the chocolate king's vest-pocket utopia, they rented a deserted, run-down schoolhouse in Palmyra, three miles away. This they transformed into union headquarters. Within two weeks they had signed up 1600 of the 2400 employed at the plant.

The story goes that a few days after the signing of the Carnegie-Illinois Steel contract, Behman, Loy, and several others turned up at C.I.O. headquarters in the near-by steel town of Lebanon. Totally inexperienced in union matters, they insisted that they wanted to join the steel workers' union.

The infectious success of the steel campaign, however, would have borne little fruit in Hershey were it not for the unbearable conditions in the chocolate factory. For under the glittering legend there lies a real story of dizzy, back-breaking speed-up, low wages, and a fantastic system of making employees spend ten or eleven hours around the plant in order to piece together eight hours of actual labor.

Within three weeks' time, the union membership increased to 2200, and without a strike forced the company to recognize the United Chocolate Workers as sole bargaining agent. Signed on St. Patrick's Day, the contract provided for a forty-hour, five-day week, guaranteed seniority rights, and confirmed wage increases which the company had granted a few days earlier in a frantic attempt to head off the organizing campaign. Minimum wages were raised from thirty-nine to forty-four cents an hour for women, from forty-eight to sixty cents for men. Openly dissatisfied with the sex differential in pay, the union bided its time. Peace reigned in Hershey for three weeks.

Then the trouble started. You can call it



Sid Gotcliffe

"Hershey Bar Sinister" or "Hurricane in Hershey"; the fact is, work has never been steady at the chocolate plant. Every summer sees a slack period of at least two months. This year the corporation started the seasonal lay-offs the last week in March, with the obvious purpose of injuring the union. Over 100 workers were laid off in one day, among them many shop stewards and union leaders. Seniority rights were ruthlessly violated.

THE UNION immediately protested. Rebuffed by the corporation on Friday, April 2, the union leaders gave the signal for a sit-down. Within twenty minutes the machinery of the plant stopped completely. Taken aback by this display of strength, and worried by the union's raising the issue of a closed shop, the corporation showed signs of agreeing to abide by the St. Patrick's Day contract.

Accordingly, sit-downers evacuated the plant over the week-end, leaving only a small group behind to hold the fort. On Tuesday they returned. By that time, Hershey's satraps had plainly shown that they had no intention of abiding by the contract. Subsequent events revealed that they were already devising a shockingly vicious method of smashing both the contract and the union.

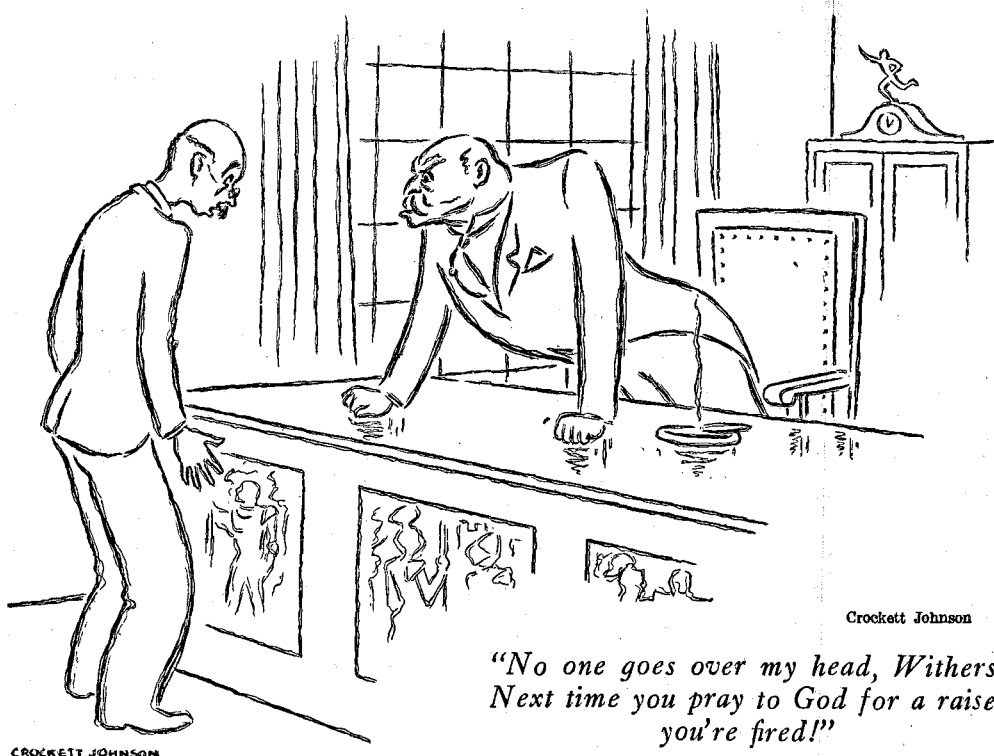
From the beginning of the strike, murmurs of protest were heard among the 2000 farmers who normally supply Hershey with 800,000 pounds of milk daily. The corporation immediately took advantage of this situation by having its friends among the rich farmers attempt to lead the others into direct conflict with the workers.

The first step was to bring a delegation of farmers to Hershey to ask that some method be found of securing a market for their milk. The union met this demand in a very sensible fashion. It allowed the factory's milk-separating machines to resume activity. The arrangement was that the corporation was to dispose of the cream wherever it could, and that the farmers would try to sell the milk themselves.

As brought out later in the Philadelphia *Record*, this scheme worked out well. Most of the milk was bought by a Philadelphian, in spite of opposition from the Hershey corporation, which apparently sabotaged the sale of cream. In fact, the scheme worked so well that the corporation began to lose support among the farmers. Many of these donated milk to the strikers.

This led to the next step. Stooges of the Hershey corporation began to foment a Red scare among all the forces they could muster. On the morning of April 7—"bloody Wednesday"—a parade of C.I.O. "opponents" was staged in Palmyra. In addition to farmers and a small group of backward workers which the corporation had organized into a "Loyal Workers' Union," hundreds of employees from the various Hershey enterprises outside the chocolate factory were drafted into participating on pain of being fired.

Old Louis Popp and many other Hershey workers quit their jobs rather than take part



"No one goes over my head, Withers. Next time you pray to God for a raise, you're fired!"

in an attack on the sit-downers. Others succumbed to pressure.

Evidence published in the Philadelphia *Record* indicates that professional strikebreakers were hired from the Railway Audit & Inspection Co. Also present in the parade were Boy Scouts, American Legion posts with fife-and-drum corps, and business men, all of whom in one way or another had been recipients of Hershey philanthropy. The Landis shoe factory and the Schneider box factory declared a holiday and ordered their employees to take part in the parade. Marchers carried placards attacking the C.I.O. as "C(ommunistic) I(diotic) O(utlaws)."

The Palmyra parade was followed by a meeting in the Hershey sports arena. Inflammatory speeches fanned a spirit of vigilanteism. An ultimatum to leave the factory by one o'clock was sent to the sit-downers. Anxious to preserve peace at any cost, the union agreed to leave the plant. By this time, however, a fever pitch had been reached in the sports arena. Foster Wagner, leader of the mob, was shouting:

"When you go into that factory, don't lose your heads. Be sure you don't hit a friend."

Evacuation of the plant was no longer an issue. The Hershey corporation was intent upon violence. Just as the sit-downers were leaving the plant, the mob attacked them, swinging clubs, blackjacks, whips, and ice-picks. Nonplussed at this treachery, the sit-downers retreated into the plant. The factory superintendent, A. T. Heilman, edged in among them, opened the door from within, and exhorted the rioters to enter.

Unarmed, outnumbered five to one, the sit-downers were clubbed, kicked, forced to run the gauntlet. Teeth were knocked out, lips split open, heads cracked. Knives, flashing wildly, found their mark. Dozens of bystanders were knocked down and beaten. The pave-

ments of Hershey, so beautiful and white, literally ran with blood.

During the riot, County Sheriff W. W. Caldwell obligingly winked one eye. When the attack was nearly over, he decided it was high time to summon the state police. These came dashing into the scene in *opéra-bouffe* style from the training school only four blocks away from the mob assault. They came to preserve the peace after the damage was done, after one of the very few cases where blood had been shed in an American sit-down strike.

THE MYTH of the Hershey "dream town" has vanished into thin air. But from the ashes of the Hershey legend there have sprung up two new legends to take its place. The first, born of a fascist vigilanteism, has already borne fruit. In Bellefonte, Pa., vigilantes burned down C.I.O. headquarters and drove out of town four men who had been picketing peacefully in front of the Tital Metal Works. They carried banners inscribed: "Hershey did it—so can we."

The second legend is less spectacular. It's the legend of once jolly-faced John Loy, his teeth knocked out, swearing to devote his life to union activity; of burly Russell Behman, now a little less burly, organizing a picket line as soon as he recovered from the beating; of 600 laughing workers parading before the chocolate factory and singing "We shall not be moved"—marching through the driving rain that cleansed the streets of Hershey during the days following bloody Wednesday. It's a legend of Pennsylvania small-town folk and farmers' children who started out by wanting to join the steel union and stood up beneath the blows of a mailed fist which until now had been sheathed in a glove of the softest velvet.

It's something that may yet make a genuine "dream town" out of Hershey.



# Wounded in Action

*Fascist bullets struck this young American in two places, but he is still able to write his impressions of front-line doings*

**By a Member of the Lincoln Battalion**

**D**EAR EVERYBODY: Fight against fascism now! For the cost in lives, pain, suffering is almost, excepting for the durable working class, unbearable.

Hurrah! Hurrah! The American Battalion has advanced more than half a mile against the best-trained murderers that Hitler fascism could ship to Spain. The American boys have shown their guts, ability, willingness to give their all—and some *have* given their all—to fight the terror of degradation and barbarism. So please, for the sake of the working class of the entire world, never stop for one moment in the defense of Spanish Democracy, in the collecting of funds, clearly explaining to the people the meaning of Spain, and follow this with definite actions building the united front against fascism. Please; I cannot stress the importance of the united front as I would like to. . . .

I am writing this letter from a hospital bed—a bullet through my right foot, a slight, clean, but very painful wound taking about a month to heal, my eyes half-closed from the anti-tetanus injections, my hands weak from loss of blood—so you will have to excuse the incoherency and the poor script. By the time you get this letter I hope to be back at the front—again doing my darndest to answer not for myself so much as for a young kid lying in the next bed.

Seventeen years old. . . . Graduation exercises, parties, hikes, puppy love. . . . Gee, life is grand; beautiful! What a myth! What a lie!

This kid has just reached his seventeenth birthday. Emaciated, weak, old—instead of hiking in the hills with his best girl he has been hiking through the mud and filth of the front for the past five months, his “puppy love” a rifle the size of his own body. The only grand and beautiful thing in his life is his knowledge that he, together with the other millions of Spanish anti-fascists, will clear their country of the cannibals of civilization.

Spain cannot be defeated when it can put out such heroes. Those young kids will have their graduation exercises in a free workers' and farmers' Spain.

These murderers are not satisfied with the use of bullets—they use dum-dums—and recently they have perfected a new brainchild of the civilized scientists from Heidelberg University—an exploding bullet!

You have heard of the effects of the dum-dums—a deep, ragged hole. The exploding bullet not only leaves a deep, ragged hole, but smashes to bits all bone structure in the hit part.

The kid was operated upon today from the effects of an exploding bullet. He lost four fingers of his left hand and possibly the use of his entire arm. And yet he lies there—not a whimper—worrying about my foot which has blood on the bandage. He says “Malo!”—“Bad!”

Back home there, did I hear someone in his party branch say he had too much work? He is tired hearing about Spain? Anyway, he has collected a great amount of money (\$20) for Spanish democracy and therefore has done his part?

Every one of you must begin to realize the danger of fascism and war—must multiply your efforts 100 percent for Spanish democracy and for the united front in the United States. If they still are not convinced, tell them of the eighteen-year-old Young Communist Leaguer of Spain who has been fighting since July, and wounded three times, lost his brother in action, his father and mother slaughtered at Málaga. Yet while on leave, he is taking part in war maneuvers so as to perfect his ability to fight fascism still more courageously and correctly. When he found we were Americans, his face beamed. Here was the great American working class come to support the Spanish people in this strife. He asked me questions about the American Y.C.L.—what they are doing, etc., and ended with the statement of fact: “We Spanish youth, American youth, youth of all lands—together—will smash fascism in Spain and then in the rest of the world.” Can we fail such courageous, untiring fighters against fascism?

Now a few words about myself. I spent a few very enjoyable hours in Gay Paree and then began the long, tedious railroad travel to our point of destination. The outstanding event was the raising of the right hand by literally hundreds of thousands of French and Spanish people in the Red salute wherever we passed. Think of it—a French traffic cop gave

us the Red salute with the little white club they carry. Upon reaching Spain we went into training and then to the front.

I guess the story of my wound is now in order. We were attacking on a wide front. My group had advanced approximately 150 yards, to within 125 yards of the fascist trenches (you can gather from this how close we are—we actually sing and yell slogans at each other during lulls in fighting), when their machine-gun got the range. I heard the bullets bite dust within ten feet, so I took a racing dive for the nearest tree. While in mid-air a bullet hit my foot, knocking me over on my side with the power of a sledge-hammer wielded by a giant blacksmith.

This is funny. While lying wounded, what I thought was a rock hit the right side of my ass and prevented me from sitting for almost two days. When I reached the hospital, I remembered that my glasses were in my right hip pocket. Lo and behold, I noticed two bullet holes in my trousers. Pulling out my eyeglass case, I found a bullet had torn its way through the case, melting the metal frame, smashing the lenses, and casually leaving without leaving a scratch on my little white ass. Ha! Ha! And one on good old Uncle Sam, too. You remember my passport was stamped “Not valid in Spain”—well, the bullet also cut my passport in half.

This fight has taught me more about working-class activity than all I've studied in the past years. I would not have missed this for five such wounds as I have received.

Have you heard the “International” sung in a dozen odd tongues? Have you heard the cry during mealtime for more bread in many varied tongues? It gives new meaning to the words, “the International Soviet shall be the Human Race!”

A group of eight from Yugoslavia, the remainder of thirteen who started across the border—I hope the five were killed and not taken alive by the fascists. . . . The young twenty-year-old boy who is fighting in his second revolution—first as a Socialist in the Austrian Schutzbund, and now as a Y.C.L.er of Austria. . . . The many Germans who dared the border guards of Naziland to come to Spain to fight against Hitler and fascism. . . . The four Negro boys from Chicago with us—two of whom have already died a hero's death. . . .

A Tower of Babel but with one basic difference. Although we speak different languages, we understand our mutual fight and slogan: “Fight against fascism by supporting Spanish democracy.”



Arthur Getz