

Writers and supporters speak out in Los Angeles and New York City

Our reporters
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More than a hundred showrunners, actors and others marched in front of the main gates of Disney Studios in Burbank, California Wednesday morning to show their support for the film and television writers on strike since Monday. Showrunners are the individuals responsible on a day-to-day basis for the operation of television programs. They are often creators of the shows.

The presence of showrunners from dozens of television programs, among them some very popular ones, is a further indication of the widespread support enjoyed by the writers within the entertainment industry. The showrunners wore baseball caps with “United Showrunners” inscribed on them and carried signs indicating their particular shows. Those represented included “Madmen,” “Samantha Who?,” “Army Wives,” “The Riches,” “Without a Trace,” “Weeds,” “30 Rock,” “Criminal Minds,” “Family Guy,” “Bionic Woman,” “Big Shots,” “Smallville,” “Gossip Girl,” “October Road,” “My Name is Earl,” “South of Nowhere” and many others.

The cacophony produced by drivers honking their car and truck horns on West Alameda Avenue in Burbank, including sanitation and parcel delivery truck drivers, provided proof of the general sympathy for the writers or any section of the working population taking on the multi-national corporations.

WSWS reporters spoke to some of those in attendance. Ronald D. Moore, executive producer of “Battleship Galactica,” noted the future of entertainment lay on the Internet and that the companies wanted “an environment where they can do anything they want, cannibalize the work, put it on the Internet, without paying those who created it.

“I think the studio heads are isolated in this, this protest shows that. They made a miscalculation. When

they announced their demand to revamp the entire residual system and make it profit-based, there was a huge reaction. That galvanized people.

“There is an accumulated resentment. The DVD issue, the low rate paid at which residuals are paid, has rankled for years. They claimed that it was a technology in its infancy. Well, it has ‘matured.’ In fact, it may very well pass away before we see any real income from it. We don’t want that to happen again.

“I don’t think many people in Middle America are concerned about the bottom of line of these giant conglomerates, you know, the fact that Viacom may have to pay the writers a few more pennies. There would be no shedding of tears if they had to pay something. The cars honking tell me something.

“But how can they not pay us for material on the Internet? This is how people are going to get their entertainment, especially young people. When an episode of ‘Battleship Galactica’ appears on the Internet, we don’t get paid for it. It’s not fair. It’s our work.”

A writer and executive producer of “Army Wives,” Dee Johnson, explained that “I’m a firm believer in the guild. This conflict is about emerging technology, the future. If the companies get their way ...

“I’ve been writing since 1993. I wasn’t in the industry during the long strike of 1988, but I know how difficult it was for everyone.

“I think that individual voices, more personal voices, are needed in this industry. The media is increasingly niched. There are 1000 channels. People will have much more say about where to go, at least ideally. Not all of the artistic effort will be swallowed up by giant corporations. I think they have united us and that they are isolated.

“Television and film writers have been divided in the

past. They're more united than before. It's a new situation. We'll see what happens."

An actress, Caileigh Scott, fresh from New York City, explained simply, "Without words, I don't work. Everybody needs writers, they're the life-blood of what we do. We have nothing without them. Look, even the late-night talk shows can't continue without writers.

"A number of shows are closing down. This entire town is affected—actors, writers, directors, workers in the cafeterias, janitors. They've started laying people off, either because they need to, or to scare people.

"The residual issue is a no-brainer. If you create something as an actor, even a commercial, you get some benefit. How can they not pay for the Internet?"

Filmwriter Pete Rosen explained that the situation did not affect him immediately. "I'm not losing money, there are simply projects that will be held up. But every once in a while there's an issue that's worth taking a stand about. I think this is one of them.

"I think the Internet residual issue is worth fighting for now. We can't put it off for years. They're making money from this technology now.

"Actors, writers, directors are taking a collective stand. It's the creative people versus management. It's simple, but true.

"It hurts everyone, this strike. No one wants it, but ...

"When they talk to the press, they say, 'Oh, the script's the thing, the script's the thing!' But it's never the thing. It's always something else.

"It's not about my individual situation. I'm not the most affected. It's a matter of ... and this may sound trite ... it's a matter of principle."

In New York City striking writers picketed Wednesday at Chelsea Piers, where "Law & Order: Special Victims" was shooting.

Joining the picket line was actor Randy Cherkis, a member of SAG [Screen Actors Guild] and AFTRA [American Federation of Television and Radio Artists]. "The actors' and writers' unions are very much in support of each other," he told the WSWS. "Whatever the Writers Guild gets, SAG and AFTRA also get. But our contract does not allow us to go on strike, which is

a terrible thing. We should all be out together. There should be union solidarity. I strongly support the actors going out.

"Sometimes actors get paid pretty well, but then there are these long periods of unemployment. Our union has the same issues coming up in June as the writers do now. It involves residuals and getting paid for work on the Internet, which is a very big issue.

"The big companies own these Web sites. The artists should get a fair share of that. These financial issues are affecting everybody, not just our unions. Since Reagan, all the unions are suffering. Unions used to be 35 percent of the workers in this country, now it is about 9 percent. We definitely need something different."

Alan Gregor, a 25-year-old writer on the New York City picket line, also spoke to the WSWS. "Before the strike, I and two other writers were right in the middle of writing a movie which is a New York romantic comedy, as well as a pilot for a television show."

Gregor explained, "I'm a brand new writer. You hear that the average writer makes \$200,000 a year. I don't make anywhere near that amount. If it wasn't for the guild, I would be making a lot less. The companies don't want to pay us what we deserve. They don't want to spend money on anything; they just want to boost their profits. I do a lot of writing on the Internet. That is how I was discovered.

"The problem is that you can't make money on the Internet. And the companies want to use the Internet in order not to pay us anything. The companies get advertising money for Internet content, just like on television. Some people pay to see TV shows on the Internet, like on iTunes. We get nothing for that."



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