Film and television celebrities express support for striking writers

Joanne Laurier, David Walsh
14 November 2007

Click here *to download this article as a leaflet.*

A mass picket outside Universal Studios in Universal City, California Tuesday brought out scores of film and television personalities to support striking writers in the second week of their walk-out.

Television stars came out in significant numbers. They included Nicolette Sheridan and Felicity Huffman of "Desperate Housewives," Matthew Fox of "Lost," Jason Alexander and Julia Louis-Dreyfus, formerly of "Seinfeld," Katherine Heigl of "Grey's Anatomy," Camryn Manheim, Ray Romano, Kathy Nijimy, Kathy Griffin, Bill Paxton and Jon Cryer. Others in attendance included Sarah Silverman, Zach Braff, Lisa Kudrow, Rachel Griffiths, Calista Flockhart and many, many more.

The writers and their supporters packed the sidewalks outside Universal's main gates, several thousand strong. The noise of car and truck horns was deafening. The mood was buoyant, but determined. The performers spoke in quite defiant terms about the giant conglomerates that dominate their industry.

Veteran film actor Elliott Gould told us:

"The *World Socialist Web Site*—great, cool! What I think about the strike is that we're up against multinational corporations. You have major conglomerates that are controlling the content of what is being fed to the general public. It's terrible and it's somewhat fascistic, and it has dire consequences for culture.

"I think socialism would be a good thing. I've never read Karl Marx, but I think I should."

Brad Garrett, formerly of "Everybody Loves Raymond" and currently in "Til Death," commented:

"I'm here to support the writers. First of all, they're right. I'm not sure why there's an impasse; the writers should be compensated for what goes up on the Internet. It's the wave of the future, forever and ever. And just as they are compensated for films and TV, they should be treated the same if it's on the Internet. I'm hoping that everyone can get back to the table because as wonderful as it is out here today, we would like to get back to work.

"The producers have to get rid of that greed quotient. This is probably the number one collaborative business in the world. Hundreds of people work on each show. The genesis of everything in the industry starts with the writer. It starts with a script.

"There is so much intransigence because they know how much money there is. The companies keep saying, 'we don't know what to give the writers in the negotiations.' We're asking for a percentage, just a piece of the pie, because if it works for you a lot, it will work for us a little. It's ludicrous, the producers are better than that; they know what it takes to run this business.

"I hope this ends soon because 95 percent of the people in this industry will not be able to survive a strike that goes on for more than a month or two. It's sad, these are the first to arrive and the last to leave at night. We're shut down as is every other TV show. We support our writers fully and whether a script was done or not, we would not shoot without our writers.

"Sitcoms especially are a writer's medium and always will be as is everything else on TV. And so we'll wait it out and hopefully it will be a short fight, it won't become a game of chicken. You have huge egos involved. I think people need to step aside and think about the big picture and the people it's really going to affect in the long run.

"The problem today is the industry is dominated by just a few companies. Fifteen years ago, you were talking to CBS and 20th Century Fox. Today, you're talking to Viacom and GE. And the problem with dealing with people on that level is that everyone is expendable. And we're just numbers, so many of these people that are high up and run these corporations are totally unfamiliar with the process. They're not capable of sitting down with the stockholders and explaining why you need a writer. That's the level of capitalism. These studios and networks have started to be owned by huge conglomerates. We have lost a lot of the power."

Bruce Weitz, longtime actor ("Hill Street Blues" and many others), told

© World Socialist Web Site

the WSWS:

"I'm here as a member of the Screen Actors Guild because if the writers don't get what they want, we won't get what we want. I've been a member of SAG almost 40 years.

"Without writers there is no television. It goes without saying that if there are no writers there are no scripted shows. Without the written word ... nothing. They begin the creative process. If you talk to any film actor, any big film actor, the first thing they look for is the script. And if it's not well-written, they're not interested.

"The companies are full of shit and you can quote me on that. They're greedy. You know, we're not asking for a large piece of the pie from the millions and millions of dollars that they stand to make. Management is getting all the money from the Internet, we're not getting a penny. So if they were at all humane or human, they would deal out a small portion of their enormous profits to the three guilds that create the process: the actors, the writers and the directors.

"I think it's horrible that big corporations own the entertainment industry and media. It has changed the business completely. It has destroyed the creative process. You cannot run a TV show or a feature film by committee. Over the last 10-15 years, it has changed dramatically. This whole country, the whole world, has a problem because there are a few companies that run the world. That's not going to change, it's only going to get worse. I would love to see the corporations run as public enterprises, but I don't see it happening.

"I'm a Democrat and I'm ashamed. That election that they won a year ago, they haven't done anything. And they waste their time on trivial crap. Bush is the worse president this country has ever had since Warren Harding or James Polk. It's not him, he's an empty vessel. It's the people that he surrounded himself with and helped get him elected, because they knew they were going to have a puppet. But it's a horrible thing that has happened to this country and the way the rest of the world looks at this country compared to 20 years ago or 10 years ago. It's horrible."

Actor Ben Stiller commented:

"I'm here as a WGA member and a SAG member to show solidarity and support our union and I feel it's an important issue about what the new media's going to bring in. Everything that's on the table is going to affect writers and creators for many, many years to come. We've got to stand up for it now.

"Obviously, there's a lot of money involved and I think that all the writers are asking for is fairness. If you go back to the beginning of Hollywood, writers have always been the low man on the totem pole and they've always been the most integral part of any movie or TV show. It's important that they stand up and we stand up for them.

"I hope there is a lot of support for the strike. I think people will realize what's involved as time goes on. They'll realize when they don't have their television shows or that the movies being made aren't as good. All that stuff that we take for granted is not there anymore—the late night shows, etc.—and we are an entertainment-obsessed culture. Whenever the power is centered in one place, it's never really a good thing. What the strike is about is trying to take back what is fair."

Actor Danny Woodburn told the WSWS:

"Technology and art should be treated in the same way, as when an inventor gets a patent for his invention. Writers should get what they deserve no matter what media from now to perpetuity. And I'm an actor and I'm out here today because without writers, I'm just another pretty face at 24 frames per second.

"Companies find it hard to let go of the money and they don't want to report back to their stockholders, 'Oh, we're going to have to take a little hit here.' I think it's about increasing profit margins. It's a scary thing that there's been so much consolidation in the industry. With any monopoly, you lose the aspect of competition, the aspect of impartial journalism. You lose a lot of that when one company owns everything."

Actress Minnie Driver came along with other cast members from "The Riches":

"All the actors that have showed up today, it's great, it's great. Today is the day that the writers asked their actors to come. So there's a ton of actors here from every TV show showing solidarity for what is really a David and Goliath type situation. The conglomerates are the Goliaths and the rest of us are the Davids. When it comes down to it, people take care of each other.

"Reality television as a way around programming is disgusting, and nobody's going to put up with it for long. I support unions because they protect people in what is an enormously profitable industry generating massive amounts of revenue. The writers deserve a part of this. The writers' contract expires before SAG's and it's going to set a precedent

© World Socialist Web Site

for all of us.

"I come from a country [Britain] with very strong trade union traditions and many things have been won. But it's bigger than that. It really is taking a stand against the giant conglomerates. They don't just want the lion's share, they want everything. The writers are people responding to an untenable situation. There is so much money at stake—between 17 and 19 billion dollars that's going to be generated from the revenue. But nobody really knows. It's ridiculous.

"We all know that the Internet is the wave of the future. The union gave in on the DVD residuals in the hope of opening up talks and the companies have accepted none of that. So we really have to come out swinging. Any time a monopoly is created, it needs to be reminded that it is not all-powerful. I think if the message gets out, then the working people of America will really understand that these are everybody's issues. There's no great love lost for these companies."

Longtime comic performer, writer and actress Lily Tomlin spoke with the WSWS:

"I'm here to support the writers. Our show was shut down; our whole cast is here to say SAG supports the Writers Guild. The central issue right now is that the writers have no share of the new media, and everyone knows that's where the future is heading and they certainly deserve their fair share.

"Writers seldom get their fair share when you consider that they are really the seminal factor in the creation of a project. Hopefully the executives will come to the table at some point and do what's right. I think the corporate intransigence is a sign of the culture. Our government is pretty intransigent. So these companies are out to make as much money as they can, lean and mean and that's sort of the watchword of the times.

"Whatever the manipulation of the conglomerates, this is the story of our present life. There have already been consequences for creativity. However, people will prevail and humans will prevail, well, for as long as the planet survives."

Actor Gary Cole:

"Well, I'm here because you're talking about so much at stake. You're talking about new technology coming through. Both sides have issues with what that's going to mean and it needs to be addressed. It seemed to be passed over when technology changed before and the writers feel that they lost out and now they want to protect themselves.

"Without writers, I'm standing here talking to you like a dummy. And as fascinating as that is, no one will watch it. Our contract is up at the end of June and obviously the same issue exists with all the new technology. So there's no reason for us not to back the writers because we're all in it together. I wish we were all joined at the hip in terms of when our contracts all expire. But this is the next best thing.

"There does not seem to be any end in sight. Unfortunately, most of the people standing out here are going to take a hit before the companies do. You are dealing with a different animal than you were dealing with 20 years ago. Just like everywhere in America, all of us are working for four people.

"If you really boil down the math, you're not necessarily across the table from a guy who's in the movie business. Even the hard-line old studio guys ran the factory, made movies and they knew the business. Today, we're a division of a division of a corporation with tentacles all over the world. You're across the table with nations, not only with people in our country. And directly because everything is interconnected, everything is global and the Internet connects everything and that's the big piece of the pie. It's a mess, there's no two ways about it. Big companies can and have put a damper on creative content. The entertainment business is in turmoil."

Marg Helgenberger ("CSI") spoke with the WSWS:

"I don't think that the writers are asking for a whole lot. They should be fairly compensated for the fact that this content is being streamed on the Internet. It appears from everything that I've read that ad revenues are coming in, so that there is money that is being generated. It's a little bit disingenuous for the companies to say it's not. And it clearly is the future.

"The movie screen and the computer screen are going to be one and the

© World Socialist Web Site

same. The companies have so much money so they think they can hold out. They know how much money there is in the future and they don't want to give it up.

"It's no surprise that Rupert Murdoch wants to bust the union. He boasts about it. I think what they're trying to do is bust the union.

"I think it's horrible that so much of the media is in the hands of big corporations. I think it's horrible that it was allowed to happen. The fact that there are monopolies all over the place and they control the news. So many people have been so disappointed about how the news about the strike has been skewed. There's so little written about the strike. This big rally at Fox was relegated to the second page of the business section in the LA Times. I want to boycott these publications because there is no such thing as fair and accurate reporting.

"It used to be just Fox, Mr. Murdoch's company that used to be bad but today, it's all of them. Despite this, the population supports the strike because they think if you can take on the conglomerates ... people with a little bit of clout are speaking for a lot of people that can't speak out—like the guy making minimum wage. So if the writers can get their fair share and actors and directors can get their fair share then it will be a great victory for the whole labor movement."

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site