

# Pickets at CBS discuss perspectives for writers' strike

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Scores of Writers' Guild of America strikers picketed CBS studios on Fairfax Avenue in Los Angeles in the sun and heat yesterday. The continuous honking and expressions of support from passersby dominated the scene as the strike neared the end of its second week. Many of the picketers felt buoyed by Tuesday's mass picket at Universal Studios in Burbank involving numerous high-profile film and television actors.

In addition, news writers, producers, editors and artists for CBS will take a strike authorization vote Thursday and Friday. A strike could affect news programs on the CBS network, as well as local television and radio stations. The Writers Guild anticipates a strike authorization vote by the approximately 500 CBS personnel, given that 99 percent of union members voted against the last CBS offer a year ago. No changes have been made to the original offer of a 2.2 percent raise for television employees and 1.48 percent for local radio employees.

Despite being encouraged by these developments, those writers who spoke with the WWSW expressed concern about the ultimate fate of their struggle.

Randy Huggins, a writer for "The Unit" and "The Shield" on CBS, originally from Detroit and a two-year member of the WGA, told us:

"The writers are going to have to stay together because it's definitely a battle of David and Goliath, and they can wait this out longer than we can. We've still got house payments and all sorts of bills, not to mention that the holidays are coming.

"We're not the bad guys, we're the common man fighting for common man rights. To defeat these corporations, we're going to have to be innovative in our approach, we're going to have to hit them harder. I work on 'The Unit,' a military special operatives' show, and I would love to use some of the storylines

we come up with!

"Innovation is necessary, despite the great show of strength on the picket line and the general support we have. This is not influencing these people at all, not influencing the big studios to negotiate with us. We need to get more aggressive in our picketing and in everything we are doing.

"We're being so nice. We're letting people go through. This picket line is a great symbol, but I'm not sure it's working. I know the WGA has upcoming plans and I'm looking forward to that."

We explained our view that the support offered by former Senator John Edwards and the other Democratic candidates for the strike was fraudulent.

"I'm not sure about the support of the Democratic Party. I know that Edwards is going to be out on the picket line tomorrow, but I'm not sure what it will do for us. I do know that I'm going to vote to Barack Obama. I know that right now in America it's about change and I know that politics are not about who's the best, but the lesser of two evils. I think it's always going to be that way. Mass numbers would have to effect a change, like a new party that's not for big business."

We pointed out that Obama and Hillary Clinton received large donations from the media and entertainment moguls. Randy went on:

"I know we have mass support right now, but I don't want to be the bad guy. I work on a TV show and I see all the people who are out of work right now because of the strike. We're fighting for principles and we're fighting for equal rights and all that, but that grip, that assistant, all those they laid off on my show ... the longer this goes on the more we start looking like bad guys. The corporations have all the power, they have all the money and the longer this strike goes on ...

“On the other hand, I’m from Detroit and the way I see it once you start a fight, you can’t back down. I’m ready to apply the pressure and the membership of the WGA is ready to apply the pressure. Conglomerates running things is happening everywhere in America and it brings to mind the fact that this is a nationwide issue and this is a strike that the public supports.

“We are on the front lines and that’s an interesting place to be. Being African-American and from Detroit, my family were all involved in walking picket lines. That’s probably one of the main reasons I’m supporting our leadership. I think what we’re doing is right. Hopefully, we can stand up and make some progress for all of mankind.”

WSWS reporters raised the issue of Iraq and the role of the Democratic Party. Neither Clinton nor Obama, we argued, had any intention of withdrawing US troops from that country. Randy responded:

“I think we need a plan to get out of Iraq. Our plan to vacate that country should include help for the Iraqis. And if we support another party, doesn’t that give the Republicans greater strength? So you’re saying that if Obama or Clinton got into office, we would see no change? Is it possible to build a workers’ party for this election? So in the next election, if the masses support your party, that’s just going to enable the Republican regime to continue. I think you have a legit plan, but it’s a plan that has to be set up down the line.”

Greg Bradley, feature film writer and one-year WGA member, expressed the view that the conflict with the studios was presently a stalemate.

He told us: “I think that the powers-that-be have the luxury to say: ‘That’s it, that’s all you’re getting!’ But I think there’s so much at stake here that this is where you take your stand. And at a certain point, the strike will have gone on long enough that the studios will feel it where it hurts the most—in their wallets.

“You might be right that if the union leadership is promoting the Democrats, the strike is in trouble. But I really don’t know. When you have politicians like John Edwards coming on board, the question is, are they on board? The strike offers a big platform, particularly for people who want to be elected, although their agenda could probably be, definitely might be, different than ours. At this point, we have to stand together and see what comes out of it.

“I think there’s an obligation to understand that

there’s a bigger issue here. I think it’s a fair assessment that there are a lot of working class people out there who can’t afford to take a stand. Unless your movie made \$25 million at the box office and with residuals, then you’re always struggling. I’m not sure how our strike fits into the bigger picture and the politics of it all.”

Greg acknowledged that many of those who formed the Screen Writers Guild (forerunner of the WGA) were left-wingers and that the labor movement in the US had not achieved a significant victory in the past quarter-century. “The strikes drag on and on until they’re defeated.”

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