

“Everyone was ready for a strike ... and this was a kick in the teeth”

## Hollywood film and television workers enraged over IATSE sellout deal

**Hong Jian**  
19 October 2021

The response of film and television workers to Saturday’s announcement of a Tentative Agreement (TA) between the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) has been a searing denunciation of the concessionary deal and IATSE for accepting it.

On the opposite side, Viacom CBS CEO Bob Bakish, who made \$39 million last year, praised IATSE for preventing a strike by 60,000 workers that would have undermined the profits of the giant entertainment monopolies. “We are happy that we were able to, together with our industry partners, come to an agreement,” the Hollywood mogul told *Deadline*. “We think that agreement is beneficial for everyone and obviously prevents any disruption in content production.”

Opposition to the sellout is so widespread that *Variety*, a specialized entertainment publication, was forced to acknowledge the hostility of rank-and-file workers to IATSE and the likelihood that the deal will be voted down. In a column titled, “IATSE Deal Could Be Rejected by Members: ‘Our Leadership Let Us Down’,” the magazine spelled out the mood. “The deal, announced Saturday afternoon, averts a strike that would have shut down film and TV production nationwide starting on Monday morning. But in interviews and online chatter, many workers have expressed frustration with the terms and said they expect it will be rejected.”

The workers who spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* testified to this mass opposition. David, a sound department worker, said, “This is not a success. This is a 100 percent failure to deliver all while gaslighting all us members saying it’s this grand victory. I’m wholly disgusted, angry and embarrassed that this is what our leadership does. They are so out of touch they are essentially functionless. This is not what we demanded, not what we approved the strike authorization for. Not even close. But this is what we are getting with IATSE talking about what a great success this is. It’s outrageous, and we’re pissed.”

Describing the oppressive conditions production workers face, David said, “A usual day will be at the very absolute minimum 12.5 hours, including lunch. But at least 4 out of 5

days of the week, we cross into hours 14 and beyond. Usually, a week starts early in the morning on a Monday. As the week goes on, we get later and later call times to make up for the 14- to 16-hour days.”

David described what workers call a “Fraturday.” “By Friday, after we’ve already worked so many hours during the week, call time [start of the workday] will be between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m. We will shoot until sunup Saturday and spend the rest of the day sleeping. We have Sunday to get our lives together, but we’ve got to be in bed early for another 6:00 a.m. Monday morning call time to do it all over again. I’ve read stories of people so tired they fall asleep at the wheel, and some died in accidents. It’s horrific. This will keep happening with 14-hour days.”

He scoffed at the 10-hour turnaround between shifts contained in the proposed agreement. “Overall, everything has gotten worse since I’ve been in. The schedules are too packed. They don’t even try to do 12-hour days anymore. Their shooting schedules plan is going well past that every single day. This is one of the things we want to be stopped, and a 10-hour turnaround is not the answer. It won’t stop this unhealthy and flat-out dangerous way of scheduling your crew into exhaustion and sleep deprivation.”

Many workers, like David, are conscious that IATSE President Matthew Loeb and the top executives of the union have a totally different social position from the workers they claim to represent. Loeb pocketed a salary of \$494,141 last year, according to the union’s filing with the Labor Department. IATSE Secretary-Treasurer James Wood made \$361,746, and Vice President Michael Miller made \$326,321.

Pointing to the annual raises the IATSE executives enjoy, David said, “Do those represent a 3 percent increase he’s so happy to ‘provide’ for us? Nope. In two years, his salary *increase* is higher than the median income for a household. Do you think Mr. Loeb has 6:00 a.m. call times on Monday morning, works 14-16 hours every day to end the week at 5:00 a.m. on a Saturday and then has to be ready again at 6:00 a.m. on Monday for a new week?

“We work in some of the most egregious environments with

inhumane working hours. The whole culture on set is one of exhaustion, and if you're below the line, total disrespect. Studios are bringing in record profits year after year, and we get nothing in return. This [contract] was supposed to at least begin to fix that in some meaningful way. That is not happening at all, and our union leaders are patting themselves on the back for a job well done."

He continued, "We should not even consider working until we vote on the agreement. Otherwise, it gives them no incentive to make the deal. Producers are getting what they want, so why should they bother? Like the saying, 'Why buy the cow when the milk is free?' They are getting what they want. The only way to stand up to that is getting their shows shut down until an agreement is reached."

Concluding on IATSE, he said, "Their allegiance is to the producers and not to the crew. I'm so ashamed of IATSE and what they are doing, and more importantly not doing."

Paul, a camera operator, told the WSWS, "Depending on the client, it's mostly long days and short turnarounds, especially when 'dayplaying,' that is, just doing a few days here and there on different shows, which I do often as a Steadicam operator. The long days are manageable if there is ample rest between, but there lies one of the biggest issues with the current 'deal.' The 10-hour turnaround is terrible, especially since it doesn't seem to specify a maximum day. In other words, it reads like they could still make you do a 17-hour day as long as they leave that 10-hour turnaround, bearing in mind this includes travel time/family time/dinner/etc."

Paul further elaborated, "The whole point was to get treated more humanely, and the hours are at the core of this. I'd say that IATSE rolled over on the deal, in spite of the tremendous leverage they had, and gave up before there was even really anything to negotiate. It makes me feel they're trying to kick the ball down the field with more votes on contracts that suck, but it'll take more time."

Importantly, he noted, "It's to the producers' advantage to stall this strike, especially if they can keep making incremental changes that need to be voted on until they run out the clock on currently shooting productions, and the winter hiatus starts. You could already tell they were scrambling in the runup to this because most productions were suddenly going into overdrive to get done (longer days, 6-day weeks, etc.) so they were definitely running scared. It feels like IATSE didn't even try to negotiate."

Paul said the last-minute deal was also aimed at deflating morale. "Everyone was ready for a strike, prepared to sit it out, and then it gets cancelled with almost no results for anyone. It's a kick in the teeth for all the brothers and sisters who poured their hearts into organizing all this and getting the word out, getting public sympathy, etc. As far as the demands, I think being treated like humans is at the core, not just extensions of machines. '12 on, 12 off' has been a rallying cry for years concerning working hours, that should've been the baseline for

negotiations to be honest. Yet that was completely ignored. The 3 percent wage thing is, as far as I know, only half a percent more than what was originally offered, so again, it feels like they didn't even try."

Both workers expressed sympathy for the call by the WSWS for workers to form rank-and-file committees, independent of IATSE, to organize a fight to reject the sellout agreement and join the wave of strikes that is spreading across the US and the world.

Since the beginning of the year there have been a wave of near-unanimous rejections of union-backed contracts, including by Alabama coal miners, workers at Volvo Trucks, Frito-Lay, Dana Inc. and John Deere. This has now erupted into the biggest strike wave in generations, involving Deere workers, thousands of nurses, Kellogg's workers and many others. In every case, these workers confront the same issues as film and television workers: wages that cannot keep up with sharply rising living expenses and exhausting levels of mandatory overtime, which rob workers of time with their families and friends and of sleep and their health.

The IATSE leadership, acting in conjunction with the AFL-CIO and the Biden administration, is trying to block the growing movement of the working class, which challenges the whole economic dynamic of funneling ever more wealth from the working class to the capitalist owners and their stooges in the trade union bureaucracy.

It is not enough to criticize the corrupt union officials. Workers must build a new leadership and new organizations, democratically controlled by the rank-and-file themselves, that will fight for what they need, not what the corporations and union officials say is affordable. Everything depends on the independent initiative of workers. We urge workers to contact the *World Socialist Web Site* for assistance in organizing rank-and-file committees to campaign for the defeat of the sellout contract and launch an industrywide strike to unite film and television workers with other sections of the working class against the sacrifice of lives and livelihoods to corporate profit.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**