

Vote “No” on the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees MOA!

Hong Jian

5 November 2021

The *World Socialist Web Site* is calling for entertainment industry workers to vote “no” on the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) signed between the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP). The vote is to be held from Friday to Sunday (November 12-14), with the election taking place electronically and the results to be announced on Monday, November 15.

The MoA was emailed to workers and reprinted in its entirety by the industry trade publication *Deadline* on Thursday, and the release of the details of the sweetheart deal with the AMPTP has provoked yet another storm of condemnation from workers on social media directed squarely at the union leadership for daring to present them with such a rotten deal.

News of the contents of the MoA had been released in dribs and drabs, starting shortly before the announcement that a Tentative Agreement (TA) had been reached on October 16, and as the WSWS had previously made clear, the highlights were entirely self-serving.

After obtaining an historic 98.6 percent vote in favor of authorizing a strike with over 90 percent of the membership voting, IATSE claimed they had forced the AMPTP to return to the table. That night claims of an agreement on ten-hour turnarounds were floated to the press, claims, it might be added, that were roundly and properly denounced by entertainment workers on social media and in interview after interview as grossly inadequate.

Workers were and continue to be angry over the ten-hour turnarounds because they want to be able to have a life that does not just involve work, but one that also includes the ability to socially engage with friends and family. Working 14-hour days not only does not allow for that, but constant overwork and fatigue entail an unsafe working environment, as has been demonstrated by the

tragic death of Halyna Hutchins on the set of the film *Rust*.

At no time did workers call for ten-hour turnarounds, and when it was revealed that that was precisely one of IATSE’s bargaining aims, there was an explosion of anger on social media and in town hall meetings sponsored by the unions. Entertainment workers themselves have been demanding a minimum of 12-hour turnarounds so that they could at the very least sleep properly at night, with some workers calling for the return of the eight-hour day that was originally won almost a century ago but that has been under increasing attack in industry after industry over the recent period.

In the event, the MoA does not even provide for the unsafe and hated ten-hour turnarounds. According to the language of the MoA, not only does the ten-hour turnaround not apply to on-call employees, but there are several other loopholes, and a proviso that, in case the worker must work over, they are to be paid double time for the first hour over, or as the MoA states, “the employee shall be paid additional straight time for all such invaded time.”

Further on, however, the MoA states that “An employee who has not received a ten (10) hour rest period after working more than twelve (12) hours in a day, from the time of reporting to work to dismissal, shall be paid one and one-half times his or her Regular Basic Hourly Rate for any invaded hours.” It should also be pointed out that they had originally called for this stipulation to be an eight-hour rest period, but that was struck out.

IATSE President Matthew Loeb also made great hay about the provision in the “landmark deal” for 54-hour turnarounds on weekends, and that it would end the hated “Fratursdays” (the practice of starting work on Fridays and going home on Saturday, often after dawn). Since the producers are free to move the Monday call times forward, “Fratursdays” have not been eliminated.

And, just as with the ten-hour turnarounds, the 54-hour turnaround for workers who work a five-day week, and the 32 hours for those working six-day weeks, are etched in sand. According to the language of the MoA, these two can also be cast aside, with the producer having to pay the worker double time for the “invaded time only.”

The same can be said for the meal breaks. The producers can continue to simply skip meal breaks by paying a penalty. The only concrete provisions dealing with meal breaks are the formula for the penalties, an agreement between the two sides to meet by January 31, 2022 “to discuss the provision of meal periods to the IATSE” and the proviso that “the AMPTP will issue a bulletin emphasizing the importance of providing employees with a meal break during the day,” with said bulletin including a table with the meal penalties.

Regarding pay, many, but not all workers are set to receive a three percent pay raise every year for the life of the contract, with some of the lowest paid workers initially receiving a slightly higher increase. However, with inflation hovering at around 5.4 percent, these wage raises are a pay cut. And, according to IATSE officials during the town hall meetings they set up to promote their sellout deal, the union’s initial demand was only for a 5 percent-a-year pay hike, which is 0.4 percent less than the rate of inflation, and 1.2 percent less than Loeb’s average salary increase since he became IATSE President 13 years ago.

Loeb and his cohorts in the IATSE leadership are spitting on their claims earlier in the year that this contract was about “human rights.” What the contract negotiations have been about has more to do with a game of Three-card Monte than it does with asserting the “human rights” of entertainment workers. One of the largest sections of the MoA is dedicated to internships, over which the producers are given a good deal of autonomy and almost all authority. As one worker posted on the IATSE Facebook page, “When someone has to give you the old hard sell routine, complete with shiny brochures, glossy pictures, and inspirational quotes, you can be pretty sure they’re trying to hustle you and sell you a piece of crap.”

That is exactly what is going on here. The deal that IATSE is presenting to workers is a great deal for the AMPTP and a rotten sellout of the workers whom it claims to represent. Just as the studios currently budget in penalties for meal breaks, they will also budget in the rest period penalties. What does this mean for workers? It means that workers will continue to work in unsafe environments with no rest, no sleep, no breaks, no food,

no time with family, for hobbies, or other interests outside of work, and with the current rate of inflation, the penalties will not result in better pay.

Even the inclusion of the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday favors the AMPTP, as many will lose the Columbus Day holiday, which occurs during the heavy production season, while the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday falls during the slow season, when many workers will be off anyway. Therefore, workers will lose a paid holiday, because a worker does not get holiday pay unless they work the day before or after the holiday.

Workers should follow the lead of their brothers and sisters at John Deere and vote “no” on this putrid deal that the entire leadership of IATSE is attempting to force workers to accept with the mantra of “This is the best deal we could get.” No! This was not the best deal they could get. As the WSWs pointed out previously, Loeb and his cohorts have not been carrying out a strategy designed to get the best deal possible for workers, but rather, the best possible deal for the AMPTP.

There is nothing in this MoA that even remotely resembles the needs and demands of entertainment workers. This sellout should be rejected with the contempt it deserves. A “no” vote, however, will not be enough. As we have seen in other strikes this year, significantly, the New River Valley Volvo strike, a “no” vote may force the union to go back to the table, but it will not force them to renegotiate. They will simply return with a slightly reworded version of the same rotten deal.

Therefore, it is imperative that along with voting “no” on this MoA, workers begin to take the initiative of the struggle out of the hands of IATSE and put it under the democratic control of entertainment workers themselves. To do this, rank-and-file committees need to be formed to prepare workers’ demands and organize the struggle independently of the bought-and-paid-for IATSE leadership. These committees must prepare strike action and broaden the struggle, reaching out to other entertainment workers and other sections of the working class such as teachers, logistics workers, autoworkers and workers internationally.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact