

“We’re humans, we want to be able to stop and eat lunch after six hours of working”

Film industry workers speak out against IATSE sell-out contract ahead of November 12 vote

Our reporters
9 November 2021

On Friday, November 12, 60,000 film and television industry workers nationwide, members of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), will vote on a memorandum of agreement between the union and the film industry.

The contract includes hated 10-hour “rest periods” that create loopholes that management can easily use to push workers past this minimum break time, the continuation of so-called “Fratursdays” (working Friday through early Saturday morning), a three percent annual pay raise (despite inflation being over five percent nationally and more in expensive cities like Los Angeles), and absolutely no guarantees of sufficient time to break for food and rest during a production shoot (IATSE has toothlessly stated they will “issue a bulletin emphasizing the importance of providing employees with a meal break”).

This “agreement” was cynically presented to workers by IATSE leadership as a “Hollywood Ending.” But after voting 98.6 percent in favor of a strike, tens of thousands of entertainment workers correctly see it as a sellout.

The movement of film and television workers against IATSE is just one reflection of a broader movement of the working class. More than ten thousand workers at John Deere have just rejected a second rotten UAW contract in defiance of the heavy equipment giant and the UAW.

On Tuesday, the *Sacramento Bee* published an article, “California workers threaten strikes from health care to Hollywood. Will their power last?” which noted the upsurge of workers struggles in California, in particular. This includes 30,000 health care workers poised to strike next week in Southern California and 700 Kaiser

engineers who have been on strike for nearly 50 days in Northern California.

Behind the scenes, the ruling class is nervous. No doubt the Biden administration is in talks with the UAW, the USW, the AFL-CIO, IATSE, and other unions over how to stop the strike wave.

The *World Socialist Website* spoke to several film and television industry workers over the last several days to let them explain what they thought of the contract.

Rachel, a set painter in Local 729, said “I feel like this contract is almost exactly the same as the 2018 contract, and if we don’t vote no and act now, the changes our industry needs to make will forever be kicked down the line.

“I think people should vote no for industry-wide safety standards like adequate rest, and to prove we are people who need meal breaks to SIT DOWN during the day, not robots who should just keep working while eating, rather than taking a break. The meal penalties in place with this contract will do very little financial harm to rich production companies, and because of this they will continue to abuse meal penalties and not break workers.”

One worker, who we will call Adam for the sake of anonymity, is a fourth-generation worker in the film and television industry. He told us, “I’ve seen all the stuff we’ve lost.” Expressing dissatisfaction with the union he said, “you look at the things that unions are supposed to represent, the core values ... and we’ve been misled for many decades now.”

“We’re not asking to be millionaires ... If you are going to abuse us and make us work 12, 14, or 17 hours every

day, then yes, we should be fairly compensated. I think most people think we're fighting for more money, but we're not fighting for more money—yes, we are fighting for a better pension and better health care—but what are we really fighting for? We're humans. We want to be able to stop and eat lunch after six hours of working. We want our unions to protect us more than state and federal laws do.”

Louis, a camera operator, whose real name has also been withheld, said that he thought “quality of life is a big issue for people.” He continued, workers “are tired of sacrificing family and other issues like that in order to provide for themselves. A lot of people are tired of having one over the other.”

Louis works in reality television. He explained that reality television workers were permanently stuck at a lower tier of pay. “We're really tired of that,” he exclaimed. “Reality doesn't even have a set weekend. In the reality television world, it's all about the shooting schedule. They don't work Monday through Friday! No, not even close.”

Adam stressed that safety was a top concern of IATSE members, “There have been recent deaths—not just the DP [in reference to the fatal accident on the set of *Rust*—but there have been people who have fallen out of perms [wooden beams in the ceiling of a sound stage] after working 17 hours a day, and they don't get any kind of spotlight or media attention. There have been people who have fallen asleep while driving home, after being turned down a hotel room, that have been injured.”

“And there are people like myself who have spent 17 years in this industry, working 70-80 hours a week. I have a neck surgery, and they spit me out and I basically have no insurance now. And now basically can't work in the industry anymore. So, it happens time and time again. It is literally disgusting what's going on. It's the working conditions that we're really fighting for.”

Rachel expressed that as well: “People should vote NO because streaming productions should not have different rules apply to how they contribute to our health and pension. They must contribute equally. More and more shows are for streaming platforms these days, and this will continue to harm workers.”

Speaking about the divide between workers and the union, Louis stated, “Their [the workers'] issues are not being heard. They question the strategy of negotiation. We have been told [by the union] ‘we can't ask for this without being in partnership with this union or that union.’ But we have a simple question ‘why?’ Who says

we have to bargain within these parameters?”

Describing the intimidation from union leadership Rachel said, “I would say the most outrageous thing I've heard from my local leadership was that if we vote no, we can't change what we are asking for in the contract because that is considered ‘bargaining in bad faith.’ Everyone bought this, but I found out that it isn't true for any other union, so why would it be true here? It's a lie. I have also heard people from Local 44 parroting this line about bad faith negotiations. I think this is a scare tactic from union leadership to accept the deal and vote yes.”

Adam added, “What we feel now is our leaders are telling us we have to vote ‘yes’ on this contract, or we are not ‘in solidarity with them.’ And that we need to wait another three years to address our concern. But we've been told that for the last three decades. So now is the time to stand up and say ‘no.’ We're not going to let another day go by.”

A fourth worker, who spoke to WSWs reporters outside a meeting of IATSE rank-and-file members in Los Angeles, said he was inspired by John Deere workers. “I love seeing in the media what they are doing. I like how it seems like it's starting to spark something nationwide. I hope everyone else follows suit.”

Another worker we spoke to thanked the WSWs for its coverage of the contract, struggle “you're the only ones who are covering this correctly.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges IATSE members to vote down this contract. Importantly, workers must take this struggle into their own hands! Build rank-and-file committees to discuss the contract freely, formulate demands and coordinate action. Above all, turn outwards to other film and entertainment workers and broader sections of the working class, including teachers and autoworkers. This will necessarily mean mobilizing independently of the pro-management IATSE, which has demonstrated in words and actions its hostility to the interests of workers. We urge entertainment workers to contact the WSWs for more information on the building of rank-and-file committees.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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