

IATSE declares contract ratified, even though majority voted against it

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The International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) announced Monday the ratification of its sellout labor agreement with Hollywood producers, despite the fact that the majority of its membership voted against it. The agreement covers over 60,000 workers central to film and television production.

The “Basic Agreement” was voted down by 50.4 percent “No” to 49.6 percent “Yes” among the general membership. However, because IATSE uses an undemocratic electoral college-like “delegate system” in its contract votes, the union declared the contract passed by a margin of 256 voting “Yes” to 188 “No.” For the second, “Area Standards Agreement,” the delegate vote was 103 “Yes” to 94 “No.”

The narrow passage of this Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) is a culmination of the union’s efforts over the last six months to oppose, isolate and betray the struggle of film production workers. After being forced to work without a contract by the union for months, 98 percent of the membership, pushed to the brink by the inhuman conditions which pervade set-life, voted to strike at the beginning of October. Although IATSE eventually issued a 10-day strike notice, it continued working behind closed doors with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) to avert a strike, which was called off at the last minute when the current deal was announced.

With consummate hypocrisy, IATSE declared to the press that it had arrived at a “Hollywood ending.” In truth, the contract was a rotten deal which did nothing to address the core demands of the workers.

The deal does nothing to eliminate the short turnarounds between shifts which leave workers exhausted, continues the so-called “Fraturdays”

(working Friday through early Saturday morning), includes a 3 percent annual pay raise equivalent to a 3 percent wage *cut* with current inflation at 6 percent, and no guarantees of sufficient time to break for food and rest during a production shoot.

IATSE pressed forward with the sellout contract even after the tragic death of Halyna Hutchins in an accidental on-set shooting, which stemmed from the very conditions IATSE workers have been fighting against.

These maneuvers are part of a wider campaign by all unions to sabotage an “autumn offensive” in which the working class is attempting to fight back against decades of wage stagnation and unsafe working conditions.

The IATSE playbook was borrowed wholesale over the weekend by the health care unions at Kaiser Permanente, who called off a strike by 32,000 workers at the hospital chain in Southern California and a separate strike by 2,500 pharmacists in Northern California this weekend, both of which had been scheduled to begin Monday. The new contract in Southern California contains paltry 2 to 3 percent wage increases and a regressive attendance bonus, which discourages nurses from taking contractually allotted sick days.

On Friday, the UAW announced it was forcing a re-vote on virtually the same contract at John Deere which workers had rejected two weeks ago, in a bid to end the monthlong strike by 10,000 workers. Significantly, the announcement came only one day after charges were filed against yet another corrupt UAW official, who embezzled \$16 million, which he blew on casinos in Detroit.

Workers know that conditions are more favorable now than they have been in decades for them to fight

against these concessions. But the corporate-financial oligarchy, which has been making more money on the stock market than ever before over the course of the pandemic, is relying principally on the services of the unions to disrupt and betray this movement.

This is part of a broader strategy of the Biden administration, who dispatched two cabinet members to picket lines last month, to bolster the unions as a form of police guardianship over the working class. At the same time, the courts have granted several injunctions against pickets across the country, and the Biden administration has been publicly floating the idea of using the National Guard to relieve port congestion on the West Coast.

After the announcement of the tentative agreement, IATSE workers angrily took to social media to denounce the leadership, forming rank-and-file meetings to call for a “No” vote. As one worker wrote in response to IATSE’s announcement, “The Big Production and Streamers Bosses are breaking cigars with Union Bosses right now!”

When IATSE International President Matthew Loeb contemptuously told workers, “From start to finish, from preparation to ratification, this has been a democratic process to win the very best contracts,” workers responded angrily.

“Everyone leading IATSE should be ashamed of themselves,” wrote one. Another said, “I call shenanigans on that vote margin as well as turnout.” And another, “WILDCAT STRIKE.”

Earlier this week a veteran film and television worker, a member of IATSE, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “There are two enemies: AMPTP and the IATSE leadership. ... IATSE leadership has and is still actively working to try to keep the rank and file away from each other, which is super disturbing. They are blocking all kinds of movement and coordination among the rank and file. Some in leadership are spreading misinformation about the contract and the vote. It’s very chilling how they are trying to manipulate us.”

IATSE workers must draw the necessary conclusions from this struggle. The fight of film and television workers is not over. But workers must respond to this betrayal by preparing for the next phase. Workers need new organizations, independent of and in opposition to the IATSE bureaucracy, to provide themselves with a

forum for free and democratic discussion to prepare a common strategy and appeal for support from the rest of the working class, without fear of reprisal or constant gaslighting.

This means that IATSE workers must form independent rank-and-file committees, as John Deere workers, educators, Amazon workers and others across the country have done. They have already played powerful roles at Deere, Volvo Trucks, Dana and other struggles over the course of the year in mobilizing opposition to union treachery.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on film and television workers who agree with this perspective to contact us. We will do everything within our power to help workers as they form such committees, including connecting them to other such rank-and-file committees around the world, including among autoworkers, educators and health care workers.



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