

US writers strike enters third day as workers call for broadening the struggle: “This is a class confrontation”

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The strike by thousands of Hollywood writers is now in its third day, with writers picketing outside the major studios in New York City and Los Angeles. The strike has already forced the cancellation of several television programs on networks such as ABC, NBC, CBS and Comedy Central.

Some 11,500 members of the Writers Guild of America (WGA) are currently on strike. Contracts for the two other major film and television unions, the Director's Guild of America (DGA), with its 18,000 members, and the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), with over 150,000 members, are set to expire in June, next month.

While writers have been marching on the picket line, the union apparatus is working to isolate the struggle and promote the Democratic Party and the Biden administration. At a meeting held by the WGA on Tuesday after the picketing, one WGA bureaucrat told strikers, as reported by industry publication *Deadline*, that the “White House is behind us.”

Striking writers should recall the lessons of the railroaders struggle, which culminated in the vote by Democrats and Republicans in Congress to impose a contract that workers had rejected. Throughout the battle, the Biden administration conspired with the union apparatus and the companies against the workers.

Under conditions of escalating war abroad and a deepening economic and financial crisis, the White House is relying on the unions to suppress growing opposition throughout the working class.

On Wednesday, SAG-AFTRA sent a message to its members telling them that actors cannot actively support the strike. It stated: “If you are contracted to work on a television series or motion picture that continues to produce while the WGA is on strike, you are obligated by

your personal service agreement and the ‘No Strike’ clause in our collective bargaining agreements to go to work.”

Similarly, the Teamsters have told their members that they cannot join striking writers on the picket line, even when they are not working. “Whether you are working or not, our members cannot join the picket line, carry a picket sign or banner, distribute literature for WGA at the picket line, or walk near any picket line,” Teamsters Local 399 wrote.

On the picket lines, writers and their supporters are discussing not only the immediate economic issues behind the strike, but also the broader social and political context and the need to extend their struggle to other sections of the working class.

Nikita, a Los Angeles-based writer, told the WSWs, “The goal is to be able to have a career. And to be able to make enough to have enough where you can provide for yourself and your family.”

“It’s very simple, yet we have to strike for it.” Asked why the writers had to strike for something so simple, Nikita, replied, “well that’s capitalism.” She added that any “fairness” that might have existed in a previous era was not the case anymore.

“When I think about capitalism, it is set in a way where the big players get bigger, right? And it is not done necessarily fairly. So we are asking for our fair share of a product that would not exist without us.”

Evan, a feature writer based in New York City, highlighted the key economic issues at stake in the strike, especially for young writers like himself. “Most of my projects so far have been for scale, for WGA minimum,” he said. “With the last two years of inflation being so high, the first thing is getting minimums up. A lot of writers have been pushed towards scale, so getting those

minimums up will really help out a lot.

“I’m someone who sold my first two pitches six or seven years ago, and then I didn’t get a job for two or three years and had to go back to driving Uber and working minimum wage jobs until I got my next one. I think that if they’re able to get those residuals up so that people can hold themselves over, that would be huge.”

Evan discussed the moves towards gig work and what is driving this transformation. “It probably just stems back to Wall Street at a certain point,” he said. “They’re beholden to shareholders to get the stock prices up as much as possible. So whatever they can do to cut costs and raise profits, and not share profits with workers, gets the stock prices up. That’s the bottom line, and that’s why it’s so important for us to stand together.”

Paul, a Los Angeles-based writer, explained what is on the line for writers in this strike. “I think what is at stake here is the writers, and the position of a writer for television, new media, streaming, etc. has been consistently devalued and shrunk to the point where it is a one-off, or ‘gig-work’ economy type situation.

“The streaming residual market has been set up in a way that’s very different than what it was for network television. All of that has changed. Residuals for network television used to be based on reruns and syndication, but we don’t really see reruns as often. Syndication happens faster, but not necessarily to the same extent, so when shows don’t re-air, they just go straight to Hulu or Netflix. That means that a lot of the back-end financing we were expecting as our income has gone away, or at least shrunk quite a bit.”

Asked what stories he would like to write in terms of social life, Paul responded, “I’m interested in human problems that affect us all, whether that is LGBTQ rights, whether that is politics, whether that is financial disparities. I think these are all things that are important to us, as people. People need stories that are going to help us move the needle and start the conversation about these things.”

Three film actors, members of SAG-AFTRA who had been picketing in New York City for the WGA, explained why they were supporting the writers. Jordyn said, “Without writers, we have no jobs in film. It affects everybody, actors, crew. The main fight is for the future of the entertainment industry. We are at a precipice of changes.”

Asked about whether she thought the fight over the SAG contract that expires June 30 should be joined with the writers strike, Aaliyah responded, “There is an effort

to keep our issues separate by the corporations and the unions. But we have a common problem of not being valued.”

Commenting on the global crisis of capitalism, Jon, an actor and a writer for over two decades in Hollywood, said, “What is going on here is the same thing that is going on with politics, with corporations. It’s the same idea that ends with us paying \$7 for eggs and \$6 for a baguette.

“I’m 55 years old, and I am supposed to move in with my parents? Is that where we are going to? Is that where this society is headed?”

“The system is so broken,” he added. “These cities are so unaffordable. The people behind these gates are making hundreds of millions of dollars in salary and just want to keep it.”

Jon continued, “We don’t want a yacht or a third car. We just want to pay our rent, or our mortgage, send our kid to *public* school and make them their lunch. That is what it is about.

“This is not just in the arts. This is social problem, a social-economic problem where this entire city is feeling this. It is not just the writers who are disgruntled... This isn’t about just figuring out the whole algorithm about residuals because of streamers. That does have to be figured out, but that is just math.

“This is just emblematic, an illustration of what is happening all over the country and major cities. This is just what is happening everywhere.”

“I don’t want to offend everyone and say we should be socialists and communists,” Jon added, “but the truth is everyone is supposed to be able to get sick and get healed. Everyone is supposed to have clean drinking water and food in their fridge to feed their children. Everyone is supposed to have some place to go to sleep and wake up.”



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