

Teamsters bureaucracy orders members not to join picket lines of Writers Guild strike

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7 May 2023

Are you a Teamster member working in the TV and film production industry? Send in your statement of support for the writers' strike by filling out the form below. All submissions will be published anonymously.

Eight days before the start of the strike by 11,000 members of the Writers Guild of America (WGA), a general membership meeting of Teamster Local 399 took place. The local covers workers employed at TV and movie studios being struck by the WGA on the West Coast. At that meeting, which brought together some 850 Teamsters and other workers, top union bureaucrats feigned support for the writers while instructing Teamsters not to join the picket lines in their upcoming strike.

Teamsters Motion Picture Division Director and Local 399 Principal Officer Lindsay Dougherty addressed the workers and declared: "We stand with the writers in their pursuit of a strong and fair contract. Should the employers be unable to address the writers' concerns, and they do go on strike, Teamsters will continue to be in solidarity. Teamsters don't cross picket lines. It's not in our DNA, and it is a protected right in our contracts."

In reality, Local 399 members have been instructed by the bureaucracy not to join the writers' pickets. In fact, Dougherty has even sent word out that Teamsters in the TV and movie industries are not even allowed to join picket lines during their off time.

A six-page question and answer sheet from Local 399, issued shortly before the strike broke out, makes this crystal clear. In answer to the question: "If the WGA goes on strike, can I join them on the picket line to support?" Local 399 answers: "**No.** [Bold in original] 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. [Emphasis added]

"Local 399 members cannot strike or picket any of the companies in the [Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers] while our agreements with the AMPTP are in place."

The reason the Teamsters gives for this is the no-strike pledge which the bureaucracy "bargained" into the contract, which reads:

The Union agrees during the existence of this Agreement, unless the Producer fails to comply with an arbitration award, not to strike against, picket or boycott the Producer for any reason whatsoever, and to order its members to perform their obligations to the Producer hereunder and to use its best efforts to get the employees to perform such obligations.

This anti-strike clause has become a staple of American labor contracts in the last few decades as the labor bureaucracy began enforcing one sellout after another. It not only is an attack on Teamster members' right to support the writers in their fight against the production companies, but it sabotages their own ability to fight as well. No "militant" leadership, much less one which represents the interests of the rank and file, would agree to such a clause.

The next question asks: "If I have work scheduled for Tuesday morning, and the WGA calls a strike, what should I do?" The bureaucracy's answer: "Should a strike get called early Tuesday morning, and you are scheduled to work on Tuesday, you should report to work as normal."

Workers are only allowed to honor the picket in cases

where they actually encounter a physical picket line on their way to work. If not, the Q and A states: “you are expected to report to work.”

This “release” does not apply to Teamsters who work from home, as made explicit in the Local 399 sheet. Since there are no WGA lines to cross remotely, they cannot show their solidarity in any form and must continue to work.

No doubt, there is immense support from rank-and-file Teamster members for the writers, and virtually all have refused to cross the picket lines. But the purpose of the Teamster bureaucracy’s policy is designed to contain and limit this sentiment for a common struggle with the writers as much as possible and to diffuse a collective fight by the rank and file. Meanwhile, the apparatus gives itself the space and the “optics” to pose as militants leading the Teamster members in support of other workers’ struggles, when in fact they are doing the opposite.

For Dougherty, and the entire Teamster apparatus, “solidarity” with the WGA strikers amounts to speeches meant for public consumption.

This is a warning not only to Teamsters in the television and movie industry but also to the 340,000 rank-and-file members at UPS. Since taking office in early 2022, Teamsters President Sean O’Brien has presented himself as a break with the rampant corruption and sellouts of his predecessor, James R. Hoffa. With critical assistance from the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), a “reform” faction which has helped to whitewash O’Brien’s record, he has posed as a militant, making speeches pledging to strike the logistics giant if there is no deal in place when the current contract expires on July 31.

But Dougherty, who is rumored to be the heir apparent to Fred Zuckerman for the number two position in the entire International Brotherhood of Teamsters, shows what the real policy of the bureaucracy is. There can be no doubt that the bureaucracy is working overtime to work out a sellout deal at UPS and get it rammed past the membership well in advance of July 31.

This is in keeping with its role in sabotaging the struggle of railroaders, about half of whom are Teamster members, last year. It kept railroaders on the job for critical weeks after they rejected a pro-company contract brokered by the Biden administration, buying

Congress critical time until after the mid-term elections to ban a strike and impose the same deal. O’Brien and the entire Teamster bureaucracy were acting essentially as extensions of the White House’s campaign to block a strike, and O’Brien himself personally visited the White House seven times last year. Similar White House meetings are undoubtedly taking place this year to block a strike at UPS.

Dougherty’s doubletalk on the WGA strike is further proof that the rank and file must prepare themselves for a fight, not only against management but against the union bureaucracy. Real solidarity is impossible if it is being “led” by officials who are in the pockets of management and the corporate-controlled parties. Instead, workers must organize themselves independently into rank-and-file committees, as a means of establishing lines of contact with writers and other sections of the working class and prepare mutual support and common actions, free from bureaucratic sabotage.



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