

Strike by 11,000 US film writers enters second week

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The strike by more than 11,000 members of the Writers Guild of America (WGA) has entered its second week. Writers are in a struggle against large entertainment conglomerates like Amazon, Disney, Fox, Netflix, Sony, Paramount and Warner Bros., whose top executives have intransigently denied writers the right to a decent living standard.

The strike is part of a growing movement of the working class internationally. In the US, nearly 500 workers at the Clarios battery plant in Holland, Ohio, went on strike this week, which is only an initial battle in what will be an explosive year in the auto industry.

On Monday, President Biden broke his silence on the writers strike. At an evening White House screening of the new Disney+ show “American Born Chinese,” the president declared, “This is an iconic, meaningful American industry, and we need the writers and all the workers and everyone involved to tell the stories of our nation, the stories of all of us.”

While the WGA is telling writers that the White House is supporting the strike, any intervention of the Biden administration will be aimed at shutting down the struggle on the basis of an agreement written by the companies. Last December, the Biden administration, along with Democrats and Republicans in Congress, voted to block a railroad workers strike and force through an agreement that workers had rejected.

There is an increasing understanding among writers that they are involved in a class confrontation against the corporations, their CEOs and Wall Street, and that the success of this struggle depends upon connecting it with other sections of the working class.

“Obviously we want a fair deal,” Chase, a writer on strike, said. “You hear it all the time that this is an existential crisis, and it really is. I think the companies want to get rid of us and want to increase their profits.

Essentially, we are fighting for all of the working-class writers, trying to make our ends meet and trying to make our years. I lost my insurance this year, and I’m fighting for that, fair wages and everything else.”

When it comes to health care coverage, “You have to reach a certain threshold each year,” Chase said. “I’m in a writing partnership, and so we as individuals need to make the same amount as a single writer for a team. Even though we’re considered half-time, we still need to make the full \$40,000 a year in order to earn our health insurance, and neither one of us [Chase and Travis] made it this year. We were both shy of \$10,000, so we both lost our health insurance this year.”

Speaking on the threat that artificial intelligence poses to their jobs, Travis stated, “They [the corporations] are just making us work longer, harder for less pay, and automation is just trying to get rid of so many jobs. Within the next few years, AI is going to be a real threat to not only our industry. It’s going to start across the board to just get rid of a lot of jobs, and we are facing a crisis that we have never faced before.”

When asked if he thought workers should have control over the implementation of AI technology in their workplaces, rather than the corporate executives, Travis stated, “I think that would be great. ... We are creating the product for them. Like why don’t we have AI CEOs? We can have them make the decisions for us; we don’t need AI writers. It’s easier to replace them [the CEOs].”

Shante, an actor on the picket line, expressed solidarity with striking writers. “Some of us can’t even wake up in the morning and say good morning without the writers,” Shante said. “So we need them. We need them as actors. We need them in the industry, and ChatGPT and AI can’t replace the human touch. So the fact that these people, my people, can’t make a living

wage, it sucks.

Corey, another writer on strike, clarified the challenges facing writers in regard to work and pay. He explained that most writers have to work months before receiving their first paycheck.

“Let’s talk about a pilot sale for example,” Corey said. “Someone created a TV show, sold the pilot show to a network, and then they sell it for, let’s say, \$100,000. Somebody will say, ‘Oh, that sounds like a lot of money,’ but what you have to understand is that’s just not one payment of \$100,000, and even if it was, you’re still going to be paying out your rep commission, which is going to be 10 to 25 percent of that. You’re still paying out dues to WGA, which is small, but takes up 1.5 percent. You’re still paying taxes out of that, which could be anywhere between 20 to 35 percent.”

In response to comments on a *Deadline* article slandering the striking writers as “greedy,” Corey replied, “That’s laughable really. Look at it like this: One of these media CEOs will take over a major studio, and they’ll get paid tens to hundreds of millions of dollars to turn that studio into a profitable business and show growth for a quarter.

“Their strategy of doing that is to take tax write-offs on projects that are already completed ... and the CEO will say, ‘You know what? Forget it. We’re going to write all that off to offset all our profits, and then we’re going to lay off a thousand people’ ... and then that absence of payroll for that quarter is going to look like that company went into growth. That’s not growth! That is greed.”

Upon learning that Clarios workers in Holland, Ohio, voted down a union-approved contract by 98 percent, Corey responded, “It’s great that they are still fighting for what they believe in. I hope that we learn from that example. Part of the strategy from the studios is to force these sorts of divisions between us ... to kind of get that us versus them mentality as a distraction from the bigger systemic issues.”

His final message to Clarios workers was, “To the best of our ability, we can say we stand behind any worker in a similar scenario as this and that we hope they are given the same opportunities that we have in order to make themselves heard and receive public recognition for what it is that they’re fighting for, because everyone deserves this kind of fight and they

deserve to win this kind of fight.”



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