

Picketing writers in New York City: “The people who run these companies are getting richer and richer, and they’re asking us to work for as little as they can possibly pay us”

Our reporters
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Some 11,500 US television and film workers, members of the Writers Guild of America (WGA), went on strike May 2 when their contract expired. The conglomerates that dominate the industry have not shown any willingness to respond to the writers’ demands for decent pay and job security.

The highly paid parasite-executives at Disney, Amazon Studios, Netflix, Warner Bros. Discovery, Sony Pictures, NBCUniversal and the rest, who contribute nothing to television and movie production, consider the various series and films as their personal property, which only exist to enrich them and which they can dispose of as they see fit. Objectively, the strike raises the question of who presently controls cultural life and who *should* control it.

The anger of the writers is real and legitimate, as the tweets included in this article indicate.

The average television and film writer has seen his or her income shrink over the past decade, as the companies have used every trick in the book—the only area in which they genuinely demonstrate “creativity”—to cut staffing and costs. The conglomerates justify their refusal to guarantee staffing in the name of defending the “creative process” against a “one-size-fits-all” solution supposedly demanded by the writers. No one over the age of seven believes that the US film and television studios stand for anything except raking in money.

The WGA insists that the offer made by the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) would only amount to \$41 million in minimum wage increases. The AMPTP argues that their offer is worth

\$97 million.

We have no way of knowing which figure is correct, but either way, the numbers are instructive. The employers are so arrogant and oblivious they seem unaware that \$97 million distributed over 11,500 people is only \$8,435 per person. Meanwhile, the industry executives are rolling in money. According to *Forbes*, Disney CEO Robert Iger alone was worth \$690 million in 2019. Mike Cavanaugh of Comcast, which owns NBCUniversal, had total compensation of \$27.4 million in 2021.

Variety blandly noted in April, one week before the WGA strike began, that “Reed Hastings, who stepped aside as co-CEO of Netflix in January, and co-chief Ted Sarandos both saw double-digit increases in their compensation packages for 2022, with their total pay topping \$50 million each.” Between the two, in other words, they collectively “earned” more last year than the amount the AMPTP claims it is offering 11,500 people.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to picketers and supporters in the Hudson Yards district of Manhattan’s West Side on May 10, where a number of companies, including HBO and Amazon, have offices.

A retired writer, David, pointed out that he had participated in five writers’ strikes. “The 2007-08 strike was the last one I participated in before retiring,” he explained, “and I can tell you that nothing substantial was changed or has changed since. The industry is still dominated by the same bloodsuckers, and things have only gotten worse for writers.”

He went on, “It has to be understood that this is a

struggle with a long history. Writers have been battling it out with the studios for decades. In the past it was a handful of studio executives that called the shots, but now, more than ever, it's the big boys on Wall Street who dictate what happens.

“These guys who have no idea what it takes to write a story, to produce something valuable, these guys who think only of the bottom line, want to dictate what happens to writers and their projects. They're not interested in topics that matters, in serious work. Many artists, I think more than ever, are severely limiting by this. There's a lot bound up with this strike, a lot.”

The retired writer continued, “I don't know much about AI [artificial intelligence], but it doesn't surprise me that they're threatening writers with it. Can AI write a script? Sure. Can it do it better than a living person? No, I don't think so. Takes the human element out of writing, which is a key part of the craft. The plot structure will be correct and the basics will be there, but where's the feeling? The life will be gone and without that you don't have very much.”



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