

Striking Los Angeles film and television writers tell WSWs: “Our struggle is the struggle of so many other workers in the US and all over the world”

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Some 11,500 film and television workers in the Writers Guild of America (WGA) have continued to picket in front of the major studios on the East and West coasts following the expiration of their contract on May 1. Already the strike has forced the cancellation of several late night shows and delayed production on upcoming shows and films.

The strike by workers against the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP), which represents the major studios and networks, is part of a global upsurge of the class struggle that continues to intensify in the US and internationally. From 525 autoworkers at the Clarios plant outside Toledo, Ohio, to angry dockworkers, who have been forced to work with an expired contract for nearly a year, to massive protests against French President Emmanuel Macron’s pension cuts, workers around the world are coming into struggle against major corporations and their capitalist politicians.

In the case of the writers, they are striking against some of the largest multi-national corporations on the planet, including Amazon, Walt Disney, NBCUniversal and Warner Bros. Discovery. More than two weeks into the strike, these monopolies have shown no appetite for meeting the writers’ reasonable demands.

Like other workers, writers are not only facing rapacious corporations, but rampant inflation, which makes it difficult to live in New York and Los Angeles, two of the most expensive cities on the planet.

Outside Netflix’s Los Angeles headquarters on Wednesday, Chris told WSWs reporters, “We are fighting for our livelihood, we’re fighting for a way of working that’s disappearing.”

The impoverishment of workers, Chris explained, was a deliberate process on the part of the corporations. “They are looking to pay as little as possible for as much work as possible. So we are here demanding fair wages, compensation, all of the things that will make it possible for us to keep doing what we do.”

For most writers the current economic set-up is “not compatible” or a “sustainable way of working,” Chris added. “The downward pressure from the corporations means that it’s harder and harder for an average working writer to make a living in a major US city in 2023. Buy groceries, pay for gasoline and rent and all those things.

“I see it as corporations versus workers, it’s as simple as that,” he continued. “What seems apparent is that our struggle is the struggle of so many other workers in the US and all over the world. Certainly when you see teachers, rail workers, others, even down to people who work in coffee shops, trying to unionize, they’re essentially saying the system doesn’t work.”

“This is bigger than just we as writers would like a fancier car or a better view of the Hollywood Hills,” he added. “We just want to live in this city, in this country, in the year of 2023 and not feel like the bottom is going to drop out if we don’t get a job next week or if we

have to make one paycheck last for eight months or a year. The way we work is six months of work, six months off. Seven months of work, a year off. Whether you're black, white, from a humble background, a privileged background, if you work in this business, that's the structure you enter into."

Expounding on the class nature of the writers' strike, Chris said, "We have to assert our power and demand that as a class, irrespective of color, gender and things like that. That class is saying: no more."

Asked by a reporter if he felt that the creative work currently being overseen by the major corporations was sufficiently opposed to the status quo, Chris reflected, "The imperatives of the business are often at odds with the imperatives of the artist. It's 'show business' and they are two things—and this is not an original idea—that are constantly in struggle. So the idea of creating art or entertainment that is challenging to that structure, that's a very tricky thing and often exists on the fringes in independent cinema and all sorts of other places. Mainstream American entertainment often does not and, in a lot of ways, cannot really challenge, not even the corporate structure, but even the dominance of its own type of cultural product."

"I think writers are perhaps de facto humanists. We try to find the universality, the commonality in people living both at the lowest margins of the world and at the pinnacle of the world. We try to find our common humanity. It's not always flattering, it's not always glorifying, but a good story has a villain that you understand, even though you may not like. And a good story has a hero who's not a saint, who is flawed. So it really is a matter of x-raying society and humanity. Corporations don't necessarily do that."

WSWS reporters also spoke to Lilly, a member of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) who joined the pickets, reflecting the wide support the strike has throughout the industry and working class.

Like Chris, Lilly saw the current struggle as one between the "corporations and the workers." The WGA, Lilly pointed out is, "asking for less than 2

percent of the total of the writers are creating here."

"We want to make sure that they realize they don't have product without us," she added.

While rank-and-file workers have shown solidarity with the writers by joining picket lines, the other film and television unions, such as the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) and the Directors Guild of America (DGA), both of whom have contracts expiring June 30, have instructed their members to continue to honor their contracts.

On Wednesday, SAG-AFTRA announced it would be holding a strike authorization vote by the union's 160,000 members after the union's leadership voted in favor of such an authorization in preparation for the contract expiry. A vote in favor of a strike by SAG-AFTRA members does not guarantee one will occur, as the union hastened to point out in a press release: "A successful strike authorization vote doesn't initiate a strike. Instead, the strike authorization permits the National Board to declare a strike if the studios and streaming companies fail to negotiate fairly with SAG-AFTRA for the benefit of its members."

Asked to comment on the phenomenon of unions holding workers back from striking, as in the case of dock workers who have been working without a contract for 11 months, due to the betrayal of the the International Longshore and Warehouse Union bureaucracy, Lilly sympathized, "Yeah, that actually happened with my union as well."

She noted that while "52 percent" of IATSE members voted in favor of the contract last year, "I think a lot of IATSE members, myself included, were very frustrated at the outcome of that negotiation, and I think that's why a lot of us are turning out for this strike."



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