Directors Guild of America leadership announces tentative agreement, stabbing striking writers in the back

Marc Wells
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The Directors Guild of America (DGA) announced Saturday night that it had reached a tentative agreement with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) after three weeks of negotiations.

The tentative agreement is a deliberate and ruthless stab in the back of television and film writers, in the second month of a strike against the AMPTP, which represents major film and television studios and networks. It is also a blow struck against every other section of the entertainment industry working class and beyond. The agreement is the result of a carefully orchestrated conspiracy carried out by the various unions, from the DGA to the Screen Actors Guild–American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), Teamsters and, of course, the WGA itself.

As the WSWS anticipated, this treachery was preceded by a public relations stunt, the misnamed "joint statement of solidarity," signed by all entertainment unions, which was precisely the opposite of that. It was a declaration of the union bureaucracies' determination to see the DGA and now SAG-AFTRA settle, to prevent any possibility of 190,000 workers being in a position to strike together on July 1.

The DGA has proclaimed the tentative agreement to be "historic," but if it is, it's for all the wrong reasons.

For all the pomp and circumstance, the DGA deal itself won't even offset inflation with a 5 percent increase in the first year of the contract, 4 percent in the second year and 3.5 percent in the third year. This amounts to a net loss for the entire duration of the agreement, especially considering the cost of living in cities like Los Angeles and New York, where most entertainment workers reside.

On residuals, the DGA is using a residual structure applicable only to specific cases (foreign residuals from Subscription Video On Demand, or SVOD, such as Netflix for one-hour episodes) to claim "substantial increases." There is no such treatment of domestic residuals or non-SVOD.

The "unprecedented" reduction in the length of the assistant director's day by one hour belongs in a comedy script: most of these workers work as much as 90 hours a week and, besides the countless ways studios will devise to circumvent this, the reality of film and television sets is determined by a constant pressure dictated by budgetary considerations. Every question is subordinated to profit.

The issue of artificial intelligence is of great concern to all entertainment workers: the DGA made the groundbreaking discovery that "AI is not a person and that generative AI cannot replace the duties performed by members." Such a definition leaves great latitude to the studios and sanctions them to control the implementation of AI by gradually reducing the role of members.

While the DGA leadership gives itself time and a wide-ranging media platform to trumpet its "breakthrough" agreement, no details have been made available to the membership and won't be until after a special DGA board meeting scheduled for Tuesday.

No one can seriously believe that under the present conditions it is possible for the DGA to have wrested "historic" concessions from the studios and networks without an all-out fight. The companies are on the warpath, having sustained significant losses on the stock market in 2022. Cutting costs is the order of the

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day.

The deal serves one principle purpose: to undermine and sabotage the WGA strike while putting renewed pressure on the SAG-AFTRA officialdom, which has already shown no inclination for a struggle, to come to its own miserable agreement with the giant conglomerates. If the AMPTP was obliged pay out a few pennies to the DGA in that cause, preventing the possibility of facing hundreds of thousands of striking workers, it concluded the cost was well worth it.

This tentative agreement is a replay of the DGA betrayal in 2008, when it rammed through a contract in the midst of a militant walkout of writers that lasted 100 days. The DGA deal was a determining factor in the writers' defeat. In the following 15 years, stemming from that loss, writers' living conditions have worsened, as revealed by a 23 percent income decline over the past decade.

What should writers make of the WGA leadership's own role in this business, as its leadership signed on to the "joint statement of solidarity"? Writers may ask: how could our own union help sabotage our strike? Such a question assumes that the union hierarchy and the rank-and-file writers have the same interests. They clearly do not. In reality, the highly paid Guild bureaucracy is far more terrified of a mass strike that would disrupt its relations with management and the Democratic Party than it is of having to accept and impose a rotten deal on its own members.

The mission of the combined IATSE-Teamsters-DGA-SAG-AFTRA-WGA conspiracy was to demobilize the DGA and SAG-AFTRA workers, isolate the striking writers and prevent at all costs the development of a broader strike.

If "solidarity" had meant anything to the union officialdom, the proper course was entirely clear: prepare joint action by the writers, DGA and SAG-AFTRA memberships, expand the struggle to other sections of the working class, including the dockworkers, working without a contract since July and once again shutting down operations at West Coast ports in the last few days, UPS workers, whose contract is set to expire soon, and Clarios auto workers in Ohio, who have rejected a union-imposed agreement twice.

The membership of the DGA should reject this sell-out agreement, which gives them essentially nothing and takes away a great deal from the entire working class.

The writers' strike is in danger and lessons must be drawn quickly: in the face of such a brazen, transparent act of betrayal organized collectively by the various union bureaucrats, writers and the entire working class must organize itself independently.

There could hardly be a stronger case for the construction of independent fighting organizations, rank-and-file committees that would not answer to anyone but workers and that would decide every matter through genuine democratic discussion.

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