

Los Angeles march for striking writers reveals major support, but union officials prepare betrayal

Jacob Crosse, Marc Wells
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On Wednesday in Los Angeles, the Writers Guild of America (WGA), several other entertainment trade unions, the Teamsters and Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA) sponsored a joint march and rally. Some 5,000 striking film and television writers and their supporters in the industry participated in the march.

For more than 50 days roughly 9,000 active writers in the WGA have been on strike against the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP), which represents major multibillion-dollar entertainment companies, such as Disney, Fox, Amazon, Netflix and Sony. At issue in the strike, objectively, are not only wages, residuals and better working conditions but the fate of cultural life itself: Should it be under the control of the artists and the public that appreciates it or a handful of corporate sharks?

The big companies are seeking to eliminate the majority of full-time workers from the industry, transforming the profession into part-time or “gig work.” There have been no talks between the AMPTP and WGA since the strike began. The employers are trying to organize deals with the other unions whose contracts are expiring, thus isolating the writers and forcing them to surrender.

In a repeat of the last writers' strike in 2007-08, Directors Guild of America (DGA) officials announced earlier this month that they had come to a tentative agreement with the AMPTP, undercutting the possibility of a joint strike with the writers. The DGA's announcement of a TA came less than a week after the release of a “joint statement of solidarity.” Revealing the line-up of forces against rank-and-file film and television workers, this statement was signed by the WGA, Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists

(SAG-AFTRA) and the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), along with Teamsters Local 399.

Seeking to blind striking writers to the dangers they face, officials from SAG-AFTRA, WGA, IATSE, LIUNA and the Teamsters delivered empty, perfunctory statements Wednesday asserting that the current strike was an example of “historic solidarity.”

In her comments at the rally, arch-demagogue Lindsay Dougherty, secretary-treasurer of Teamsters Hollywood Local 399 and director of the Teamsters' Motion Picture and Theatrical Trade Division, delivered her usual expletive-filled rant while falsely claiming that Teamsters were not crossing the picket lines. While it is true that some pickets are being honored during the daytime, UPS deliveries continue to be made to the studios after hours.

In light of their recent backstab, DGA leaders did not deign to send any active high-level official to the rally. Instead former DGA President Thomas Schlamme was on hand to issue a short statement proclaiming the DGA's alleged “support” for the strike.

The betrayal of the DGA hierarchy was fresh on the minds of many writers WSWs reporters spoke with at the rally.

“I hate to say it, but I wasn't surprised,” said Joe, a striking writer. “I think the last time the DGA went on strike was ... well, I want to say the 1930s. I didn't expect a lot of support from them. It sounds a little harsh, but I think that's a fair assessment of the reality.

“As to the bureaucracy, I mean, what do they always say?

The moment you have an HR [Human Resources] department, it's usually time to move on," he added.

Commenting on the suppression of the railroad workers' struggle last year by Joe Biden, Joe said, "Obviously, economics was more important than workers' rights in that case.

"I am a little biased," he continued. "I've worked a few blue collar jobs along the way, and I'm very familiar with what it's like to be living paycheck to paycheck. When you get hurt, when you have an unexpected calamity, which is going to happen just by the fact you're alive, living that paycheck to paycheck becomes a lot harder."

Referring to recent struggles of teachers and dockworkers on the West Coast, Joe concluded, "These struggles are about the essentials of how a society works. Without the workers, the city, the country, everything comes to a stop. Fighting for a very reasonable amount of the pie, considering the productivity we are responsible for, is not only necessary, but absolutely essential for everyone who comes after us. We are all recipients of those who struggled before us, and it's our duty to struggle for those who come after us."

Expressing the rising anger of rank-and-file workers throughout the industry, Johnny Ray Gill, actor, producer and director, joined the writers on the march and challenged the corporate press present at the rally.

"Nobody talks about the UPS workers that are about to go on strike," he said. "People have been striking all over, and organizations like NBC have got to cover the billionaires and the wealth hoarders."

Speaking directly to an NBC reporter, Johnny added, "Joe Biden blocked the railroad workers from going on strike, and no one ever talks about it. If we have a mass media that will not educate the people about what's going on in their own communities, how can we fight back?" As soon as Johnny mentioned Biden's name, the NBC reporter took away the microphone and scurried away.

Continuing the conversation with the WSWs, Johnny explained, "The wealthy people are hoarding all the resources. I was reading [Howard Zinn's] *A People's History of the United States*, which points out that people were growing oranges during the Great Depression, and armed guards came and blocked the people from the trees so they couldn't get food. That is what we are dealing

with in this country.

"I always use the example about the oranges. Because that's what capitalism does. It brings out the worst in us, right? It treats people, not like people, but only for profit.

"The wealth is in the hands of a select few corporations. I think climate change has exacerbated the situation and really showcased that reality to everybody. They say one thing, 'Climate change is an existential crisis,' and the next thing you know, Joe Biden allows a freaking pipeline to be built during this fake debt ceiling fight. So we have the resources to solve these problems, whether it's homelessness—we have enough houses for everybody—or whether it's healthcare."

Asked to comment on the ongoing war in Ukraine and US preparations for war with China, Johnny said, "My thoughts are: War hasn't been beneficial to anybody. It's the poor, it's the black and brown and the workers who are going to die. They die for people that don't care about them."

Speaking to the growing class consciousnesses in the working class, especially following the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, Johnny explained, "We have the power. We found that out during the pandemic. All these people that we were told were not important, for example, people that work at grocery stores, we found out we need them more than we need the advertising executives."

Johnny agreed that workers around the world were engaged in a class conflict, "There's probably going to be a nationwide strike or a worldwide strike at some point, because these things are happening all over the globe."



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