

Thousands of actors join picket lines in Los Angeles and New York

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The strike by tens of thousands of US film and television actors officially began Friday. The actors, members of the Screen Actors Guild–American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), have now joined the 11,000 members of the Writers Guild of America (WGA), on strike since May 2.

The actors and writers are striking against the cabal of giant film and television production companies organized in the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) over fundamental economic issues. Each group of workers has lost substantial income through the introduction of streaming services, the end of decent residual pay and the various means by which the industry is “casualizing” labor and turning the acting and writing professions into forms of “gig” employment. Artificial Intelligence, in the hands of the corporate predators, promises even more devastating attacks on income and jobs.

However, powerful social and cultural currents are also at work in the current entertainment industry walkout, which the actors have now joined with considerable enthusiasm and élan.

In Los Angeles, there was large-scale picketing outside the major studios. In New York, strikers marched outside the offices of companies such as Netflix, NBCUniversal, Paramount, Amazon and Warner Bros. Discovery.

The scenes of mass picketing in both cities, with great numbers of performers and writers and thousands of young people, in particular, participating, had a generally rebellious, celebratory character. At last, the strikers and their supporters seemed to be saying, at last we have a chance to challenge the swine on top. Slogans about “corporate greed” and “greedy bosses,” organized by the unions, may have had their generic character, but many chanted with genuine enthusiasm. Between the writers and actors a strong sense of unity and solidarity prevailed.

It is already obvious that the “double strike” by actors and writers is a pole of attraction generating great public interest and support. It has focused attention on the questions that the media and the entertainment industry itself have deliberately

suppressed: vast and malignant social inequality, the relentless drive by the giant corporations against workers’ conditions and rights, the harsh reality of social life for tens of millions in America.

Many prominent performers joined the picketing, including, according to *Deadline*, Allison Janney, Timothy Olyphant, Josh Gad, Sean Astin, Charlie Barnett, Joey King, Chloe Fineman, Susan Sarandon, Ginnifer Goodwin, Patton Oswalt, Marg Helgenberger, Jake McDorman, Constance Zimmer, Michelle Hurd and Jason Sudeikis.

The vast majority of actors do not make a living wage or even find work on a regular basis. Only a small percentage earn enough annually to qualify for the union’s health care threshold of \$26,470. At the same time, they are well aware that an executive such as Ted Sarandon of Netflix earns that “threshold” amount every two days.

The appearance of a report July 11 in *Deadline*, the entertainment publication, revealing that the strategy of the AMPTP is to starve the writers out over the course of months has sparked outrage among film and television workers. According to the article, “Receiving positive feedback from Wall Street since the WGA went on strike May 2, Warner Bros Discovery, Apple, Netflix, Amazon, Disney, Paramount and others have become determined to ‘break the WGA,’ as one studio exec blatantly put it.”

The studios and the AMPTP “believe that by October most writers will be running out of money after five months on the picket lines and no work. ‘The endgame is to allow things to drag on until union members start losing their apartments and losing their houses,’ a studio executive told *Deadline*. Acknowledging the cold-as-ice approach, several other sources reiterated the statement. One insider called it ‘a cruel but necessary evil.’” This is the real face of American “democracy”: if workers use their legal right to strike, destroy them.

The strike is already one of the largest in years in the US. But the actors and writers themselves are well aware that huge battalions of the working class are waiting in the wings. Numerous strikers refer in particular to the hundreds

of thousands of UPS workers whose contract expires July 31. Actress Susan Sarandon told one reporter in New York Friday, “We see the teachers striking, we have the UPS workers about to go out. The railroad people should have been able to go out and Biden busted that strike.” One writer, speaking to the WWSW Thursday in New York, linked the strike by the writers and actors with the potential strikes by UPS and other sections of workers. He thought we might see a “summer of strikes.”

A WWSW reporter offered this report on the first day of the strike in Los Angeles: “Despite the heat, writers and actors marched together at the picket lines in front of Amazon Studios today. The writers generally felt relieved and reinvigorated by the actors joining the struggle. Though the writers have been on strike for months, there was a sense that long-awaited reinforcements had finally found their way to the battle. Many of the writers were actors, and many of the actors were writers, and they readily understood the struggles the others confronted. They face the common problems of pay and residuals, casualization, and the threat of replacement by AI, and they work for and are striking against the same studios. There was a real sense that their struggles were inseparable.

“Moreover, it was easy to talk to workers about broader struggles. When we raised the struggle at UPS and at the docks, workers intuitively supported the struggles by other sections of the working class. One said that ‘the pendulum had swung in one direction for too long,’ and that it was finally beginning to turn around. Of course, the political questions have yet to be worked through, but there is definitely a feeling that their struggle is part of a broader counteroffensive of the working class.”

A WWSW reporter described the picketing in New York at Amazon/HBO headquarters on the far West Side in midtown Manhattan and at Paramount Studios in the heart of the theater district in Times Square: “There were about 150 pickets at each location. Even though they were kept moving in a tight circle, the mood was exuberant, particularly when passing cars, trucks and double-decker busloads carrying tourists honked their support. There was broad receptivity to our leaflets and receptivity to our slogans calling for the broadest support of their strike, its significance for other sections of the working class both in the US and internationally, and its cultural impact.

“One actor who spoke with us spoke out strongly against the inequality between the producers and the actors on strike. He denounced the producers, ‘who are multi-millionaires and billionaires for trying to play poor and not give actors their fair share. It is not right.’ Another called attention to the ‘type of people we’re dealing with here who are trying to starve the writers [referring to the *Deadline*

article]. She was amazed at their callousness and called attention in addition to the families who were dependent on the writers. ‘How can you starve people out like that?’”

For the moment, the US media is stunned. Believing their own drivel about American society, the media pundits are astonished by the expression of mass popular hostility to the corporate oligarchy and, even more threateningly, by implication, the entire “free enterprise” system.

The various union bureaucracies that conspired to isolate the writers’ strike in the interests of the corporations—the Teamsters, IATSE and the rest—have also been set back on their heels. Their plans have been disrupted.

These forces will regroup and launch new attacks on the writers and actors. SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher continued her posturing Friday as a ferocious opponent of the “very greedy entity,” the AMPTP. On the first day of picketing, she insisted that “If we don’t take control of this situation from these greedy megalomaniacs, we are all going to be in threat of losing our livelihoods.” In fact, what Drescher and the National Board of SAG-AFTRA are desperately seeking is a few crumbs from the corporations they can present to their members as a “historic” victory.

The thousands of actors and writers should make it their business now to direct themselves toward the great mass of the working class, who face the same attacks and who also are looking for an opportunity to fight. There is absolutely no reason, except the opposition of the SAG-AFTRA and WGA leaderships, why actors and writers should not explain their case at factories, hospitals, schools and other workplaces, and build up support for a far wider strike movement. To lead the sort of political, social and industrial offensive that’s called for, actors and writers need to take command of their own strike through democratically organized rank-and-file committees, outside the control of the union bureaucracies.



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