

“Capitalism is a cancer”

Film and television strikers in Los Angeles call for mass action: “I think we need a general strike in this country”

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A powerful and militant mood has taken hold among the over 10,000 writers in the Writers Guild of America (WGA), who have been on strike since May 2, and 65,000 members of the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), who joined their class brothers and sisters on strike last week.

The attempt by the major networks and studios represented by the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP), in coordination with the leadership of the various unions, to isolate the striking writers has backfired in the face of strong opposition from workers in both unions unwilling to be abandoned and defeated.

Frightened by the prospect of the “double strike” continuing and expanding to include other sections of the working class, such as the 340,000 UPS workers, whose contract expires at the end of the month, and the over 160,000 autoworkers in the UAW, whose contract expires this fall, the Biden administration, as it did with the railroad struggle last year, is working “in the shadows” to suffocate the strike and enforce a corporate-friendly agreement.

On Tuesday, the *Hollywood Reporter* published an article headlined “The Behind-the-Scenes Players Seeking a Path to Hollywood Peace.” The authors wrote that “growing fear of a lengthy standoff between talent unions and studios” had prompted “a handful of seasoned negotiators” to begin “working in the shadows to find a way forward.”

The report disclosed that “Javier Ramirez—President Biden’s choice to be director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS)—and Jimmy Valentine, an FMCS commissioner based in Glendale, have had meetings with the parties [AMPTP and SAG-AFTRA] for weeks.”

The FMCS was created as an “independent agency” as part of the passage of the anti-worker Labor-Management Relations Act of 1947, more commonly known as the Taft-Hartley Act. According to the US government, “the mission” of the FMCS is to “prevent or minimize the impact of labor-management disputes on the free flow of commerce by providing mediation, conciliation and voluntary arbitration.”

While the FMCS cannot force a deal on either of the parties, a federal mediator, speaking on behalf of the Biden administration, can provide a pro-company framework as the basis of any future deal.

While federal mediators, working hand in hand with Hollywood

executives, operate “behind the scenes” to force a deal on workers, the union bureaucracies, in conjunction with the pseudo-left Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), are seeking to stab not only striking writers and actors in the back but UPS workers as well.

On Wednesday, the DSA-LA Labor committee will be sponsoring a rally with the chief Teamsters bureaucrat Sean O’ Brien. This past Saturday, O’Brien held a similar event in New York City with DSA member and strikebreaker Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Ocasio-Cortez, was one of three DSA members—the others being Cori Bush (Missouri) and Jamaal Bowman (New York)—to vote in favor of House Joint Resolution 100 last November that blocked some 110,000 railroaders from exercising their democratic right to strike.

The fact that the WGA and SAG-AFTRA leadership is promoting a rally with the same forces, O’Brien included, who worked “behind the scenes” last year to block the railroad strike, is a warning to workers that the struggle is in danger. In order to countermand the plans of the studios, working in conjunction with their Democratic Party apparatchiks in the trade union bureaucracies, it is imperative that striking workers form independent rank-and-file committees, controlled by workers themselves, aimed at not only winning the contract, but formulating a strategy aimed at the fundamental reorganization of society to meet human need, not private profit.

The combined presence of federal mediators sent by Biden, the DSA, the Teamsters’ O’Brien and Ocasio-Cortez is a sure recipe for sabotage and betrayal. Writers and actors, beware!

In contrast to the heads of the various unions, rank-and-file actresses and actors continue to speak powerfully against not only the corporations and their greedy CEOs but the capitalist system as a whole.

Leila, an actress and member of SAG-AFTRA (and SAG before the unions’ merger) for 30 years, spoke eloquently on the current and previous struggles of film and television workers and how she saw the way forward.

“The studios have increased their revenue by quite a bit, and they also decreased the actual pay that actors and writers are getting. So there was no choice. We’re seeing it all across the country, whether it’s UPS, whether it’s the railway workers. It’s really nice to see a militancy in my own group, that I’ve been sort of longing for ... I’m glad we’re joining what other workers are going through right now.

“Hotel workers, nurses ... I think we need a general strike in this country. We absolutely need to withhold our labor,” she went on.

“We should all have healthcare, not through your union, just through our government. We should all have a living wage, no matter what. You should be paid for your physical likeness. With AI, they can do body scans and continuously use you. Everybody deserves a fair share for their work. Instead we’ve got [Disney CEO] Bob Iger talking about how it’s ‘unreasonable’ that people want to be paid for the fruits of their labor, while he hoards *all* of the fruits of *our* labor.”

Commenting on the letter issued by SAG-AFTRA members warning union President Fran Drescher and the rest of the negotiating committee not to betray the struggle, Leila said she was “very pleased to see all the big-name actors who signed that letter because they actually don’t have to. It would have been disgusting if they hadn’t, but they don’t have to. So they really are doing it for the rest of us and using their enormous platforms to stick up for us because most of us are barely scraping by as working actors as it is.

“I do think this is a different moment from the 2007-2008 strike and even a year ago. If you talked about militancy, even a year ago, some people bristled. There’s been a really big shift.”

Reflecting on the 2007-2008 WGA strike, Leila revealed that “we lost our house in that strike. We’ll never be able to own a house again in Los Angeles. My husband’s a writer, so that was it. That was eight months. And what happens is, you don’t pick up the day the strike ends. It’s not like everybody’s handing you checks.

“Capitalism is broken. It’s a cancer. It destroys itself in the end, right? But along the way it’s going to destroy the whole working class.

“If the dockworkers had absolutely turned everybody away, if Biden and everybody hadn’t interfered with the railways, if we all joined a general strike and shut it down, we would bring this country to its knees.

“It’s why we don’t see the French burning down Paris on cable TV. They don’t want us to know this is what we could be doing if we don’t want them to raise the retirement age or decrease our pensions. It’s why Biden’s given more money to cops than even Trump did, because they know that the pitchforks are coming for them.

“My Twitter—I mean, who cares—but my account was banned permanently because I said it’s time to bring back guillotines. The billionaires know what’s coming, and they’re very explicit about the social murder they intend on committing. It was leaked to *Deadline* that this was part of their strategy. Some executive said: Our mission is to bleed them dry, when they start losing their homes and housing, then they’ll have no choice but to come back to us. That’s a form of violence, you kick somebody out of their house, you deny them health care. We lose 68,000 people every year in the US because we don’t have healthcare for everybody. A third of the people who died of COVID, they say it’s because we don’t have healthcare.

“Liberals love to focus on the National Rifle Association. I don’t like gun violence either. But why are they silent about the fact that our government just allows health insurance companies to deny coverage, which leads to people dying every year?”

Leila continued, “Even now, no one’s talking about COVID. A thousand people a week are still dying of COVID. We just stopped reporting it. When Trump stopped reporting it, when he said the numbers will go down if we stop testing, people were outraged. Biden comes in, and that’s fine. People are developing Long COVID. We have a mass

disabling event, and nobody’s talking about it. Even people who are nominally on the left aren’t talking about it.

“I love the idea of forming rank-and-file committees,” Leila said. “Yes, if we could do that, if the rank and file from all the different unions banded together in a general strike ... So many of us have been talking about that in this country.

“More and more people are affected by the greed of these ghouls, who are committing social murder. The rank and file from all the unions across the world should get together, worldwide socialism, that is the answer. It needs to be an international workers’ movement. A worldwide socialist movement, absolutely.”

Chris, a young actor, told WSWS reporters on Tuesday that “a lot of people can’t afford their rent. They can’t afford their mortgages. They can’t afford to do daily activities with their family.

“What a lot of people are going to see as a result of the actors’ and writers’ strike is that a lot of workers across America are undervalued, and this could start a revolution.

“This strike is going to lead other people to start striking as well because they’re going to look in the mirror and say, ‘Hey, we’re also not being treated equally. We’re also being underpaid. We’re not able to afford basic human needs, basic human functions. We can’t pay our rent. We can’t pay our mortgage.’ They’re going to say, ‘Maybe we should strike.’

“There is power in numbers, always. There’s always power in numbers and in unity. And this is good for other people to see. People driving by, the cars driving by, they can see, ‘Oh, they’re striking.’ Then they Google what the actors and writers are striking about. They can find some commonalities and similarities between their own struggles and their own workplace conditions. Eventually, the people have to have a voice.

“After a while people get pushed to the limit and then wake up and say enough is enough. If a company wants to be greedy ... they have played their hand. They’ve showed their hand. Now people are starting to wake up and realize that they do have power and that they can speak up and they can say something. That’s what you’re seeing in France with the riots. And I think that’s what you saw during COVID and during protests for Black Lives Matter and things like that as well. People are starting to realize that they have a voice and that they have influence with that voice. So you’re going to start seeing it happen a lot more often.”



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