

Workers speak out: Actors and writers, UPS workers, and autoworkers across the US

Our reporters
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A week ago, tens of thousands of actors joined 11,000 writers in a nationwide strike across the United States, against some of the most powerful media corporations in the world. Meanwhile, UPS workers and autoworkers are also gearing up for battle. Contracts for 340,000 UPS workers expire at the end of this month, and for thousands of “Big Three” autoworkers at Ford, GM and Stellantis in September.

Below is a roundup of video comments from actors and writers, UPS workers and autoworkers that appeared on the *World Socialist Web Site* in the last week. All of these videos can also be found on our Youtube channel.

Actors and Writers

“For the writers and actors, whatever you call it—AI automation, ‘deep fake’ CGI technology—where they’re resurrecting dead actors, it’s an insane thing. It’s got to be a minimum in every contract that you can’t just replace people that are in the union with a computer program.

“Hopefully [this fight] will spread to other industries and other unions. It’s a major strike wave around the country right now. So if either or both the actors and writers got a good contract, that would be a good thing for our brother unions. I know the UPS workers are about to go on strike.”

“With the shift to streaming services, we’ve seen the entire nature of media change. One of the chief ways is the total obliteration of residuals and royalty pay. For instance, I worked on an Amazon Prime series; it was my first recurring guest star role. And I will see no residual pay for that at all. And in fact the show was nominated for nine Emmy awards.

“I was in several scenes across several episodes. It’s generating all kinds of attention, media coverage, views, and of course pulling people to the Prime streaming platform. I’m not seeing any economic gain from that, and I’m working in a dessert shop right now for minimum wage to pay my rent, which LA is the third most expensive city [in the US].

“I do think the world is looking at this movement, and it is interconnected with not just actors and writers, but also the UPS drivers and so many other workers not just in America but throughout the world; it’s part of a larger arc of labor in human history. We’re looking at how a group of companies can extract as much profit from labor as possible and create a system where that labor struggles very hard just to make ends meet.”

“I’m not anti-AI. I’m a nerd; I like to code and study machine learning. I think that AI as an assistant is one thing. AI as a replacement is another thing. That’s what we’re trying to stop from happening, is AI replacing people and being used as a mechanism to oppress people, manipulate and exploit people. That’s not cool.

“You will see across industries that this is only the beginning. I’m not here to say AI is terrible and we shouldn’t do it. But we can eradicate

homelessness, poverty, unfair housing with these magnificent tools.

“I’m out here doing it for the ones who come after us, for the future generations ... It’s about growing with technology and not letting technology control us. Let’s use it to help us all instead of just a few and screwing everybody else over.”

“I love the idea of forming rank-and-file committees. If the rank and file from all the different unions banded together, a general strike ... I mean so many of us have been talking about that in this country. We see it happening in Europe. We need that in this country.

“Our power is our labor, and if we all did a general strike and shut it down, we would bring this country to its knees. Rank and file from all unions across the board should get together. You are worldwide socialists. That is the answer: a worldwide socialist movement, absolutely.”

“I’m fortunate enough to be a full-time actor, but it took 10 years to get here, and I’m not making crazy money. People sometimes think we’re all Hollywood celebrities, but there are 160,000 members of this union and not all of us are George Clooney or Meryl Streep...”

“The majority make their living through day jobs so they can have a career in this industry. You have to make \$26,000 to qualify [for health care], and 87 percent of union members don’t make that annually.

“In the beginning of COVID in 2020, we remember seeing Amazon Prime workers being worked to death, under harsh conditions, unable to even go to the bathroom, and scare tactics were used on them to not unionize. We are fighting Prime Video, it’s the same company...”

“UPS is going to strike. That’s the same union as the people who drive us to and from set ... You don’t have to be an actor to get what this is.”

“We create media. What does every doctor do, or accountant or anyone? You go home to decompress, you watch television, listen to music, or look at art. And it’s considered such a lowly thing by the people who we are striking against today, so that how we pay our bills is not actually through media. I work at a restaurant. I work almost full time there...”

“We are here today because of that Deadline article that came out that said, ‘We’re going to let them bleed out until people lose their houses.’ They picked the wrong ones to say you’re going to lose your housing. Because if there’s anything that artists are, it’s creative and hustlers.”

“This is about the people at the top who have organized a system so they can profit the most, pushing out the lowest level of labor, and they don’t care about the jobs that can be lost, or the working conditions that have quickly gone down.

“They want things created so quickly that we’re working in such unsafe standards in terms of how fast they want to pump out this content. It’s not just that they want us to do our jobs at a breakneck speed, they want all the crews to work on top of each other. So it’s crowded, we have riggers working on top of carpenters and scenics. Not only is it unsafe but it’s completely unnecessary.

“If you’re on set you might be working a regular 14 hour day, five days a week. It’s obscene. It’s unsafe to work that many hours and then commute home. People are falling asleep in their cars.

“Film sets are the least glamorous places on earth. This is about the workers. We need safer working conditions. If we let ourselves be taken advantage of, there will be no sustainable jobs to go back to. It’s now or never.”

UPS workers

“Trucks have no A/C. They get to about 120 degrees in the back. So when you’re searching for a package back there it’s horrible. You could be back there five minutes. We’re provided water but not anything to keep cool, long enough for 12 hour shifts, sometimes even longer.

“We don’t have family time. We get up early in the morning, and get home late at night. I’m a mother of two and it’s a struggle for me. I work all these hours because the company forces us and also my pay is really low. It’s not even a livable wage.”

WSWS: Do you think it’s connected to this government supporting the war [against Russia in Ukraine]?

“I think so because a lot of our money is being sent. The enemy is not their working class, the enemy is the upper class now. The heads of our corporations have mansions. And what do we have? But we’re the ones doing all the work.”

“We don’t really get hours. So the \$20 an hour is nice, but when you only work two hours a day, that’s \$40 a day, only five days a week.”

“I can’t afford it. This economy is crazy. Inflation is real. Bills are real. I have to feed myself. Sometimes I don’t even eat.”

“I swear I have not eaten in two days.”

“I would want to strike anyway, but when they came back with a pay *decrease*, that’s when it clicked with me, nothing’s going to get through to these guys. They’re spending billions of dollars on buybacks, and they have all this money to renovate the facilities for the scab workers that are going to come in. They’re buying fleets of new forklifts, and spending all this money on cameras to make sure the property is protected. But when it comes to people’s well being, their paychecks, the hours they’re working, they’re doing everything to scrape it back.

“It’s the same crap happening for hundreds of years. If you had social studies and learned about the ‘robber barons,’ you’ve seen the political cartoons, with Rockefeller and Vanderbilt on top, turning the screw on top of the worker in the vice between low pay and high rent.

“How easily distributable information is now, that’s the only thing that’s giving me hope is how interconnected we all are now and how we can see that we have more in common with the people to our left and right than the person up there. That’s our biggest strength and that’s where we’re going to win this.”

WSWS: What do you feel about the actors going on strike to support the writers?

“The Hollywood elite are despicable. Talking about we want people to lose their homes and we want the strike to last until winter so people feel pressure to not lose their homes and not die in the street. It’s despicable, and I’m really glad the writers went on strike but it’s even better now that the actors are on strike.

“The Teamsters is the largest union, I think this is a third wave, the biggest one, and there’s a lot hinging on us striking.”

“There’s a lot of ducking around our pay. I’ve been here two years now and I haven’t received a raise. They are saying they’re offering us a ‘contractual raise’ to \$20, but that’s not our base pay rate.”

WSWS: Did you know that a UPS workers back in 1978 was making \$7.75 an hour, which is the equivalent to \$37 today?

“I did not know that. I think they abuse the fact that so many people are willing to work part-time hours, and they can dodge paying them what

they’re worth because they are classified as part-time.

“I think that as the working class, we need to come together and show that we outnumber the fat cats a lot. They need to start respecting us more and understand we’re not going to keep working for scraps while the table is full.”

Autoworkers

“[Autoworkers need] equality. Everyone working here should be on equal pay. It’s common sense. There should be no tiers. Cost of living (COLA) was theft when it was taken from us. I think we should be paid back in retro. That’s a pay decrease every year.”

WSWS: What do you think about the UPS workers or actors who are out on strike?

“They’re right on. I think they’re going to help us with our cause. It’s all over the world. Let’s take back what’s ours.”

“You strike for one you strike for all. That means all union brothers and sisters come together and stand beside each other and strike against these big corporations that are making billions of dollars a year. We’ve got to have each others’ backs and put our foot down and get what we deserve. I’m ready for it.

“Here, we’ve got a two-tier pay system we’re trying to get rid of. They got rid of all the retirement, you can’t retire after 30 years any more. We need to get all that back. We need to get cost-of-living back. We’re working for pennies right now and making them billions of dollars.

“[Biden] is going to keep us from striking. He’s going to do what he did to the railroad workers and he’s going to push the law where we can’t go on strike. Plain and simple. That’s how he is.

“If we don’t like what the company’s doing we ought to be able to strike without anybody saying anything.”

“Higher wage and more respect. We’re not respected. This is a billion dollar corporation. We’re not robots, we’re humans. We’ve got cartilage, bones, ligaments. Treat us like humans instead of robots. Call us by a name instead of looking at us like a number.”

WSWS: Did you hear the UAW president met yesterday with Biden in the White House?

“What was the topic of discussion?”

WSWS: Do you remember last year Biden blocked the railway workers from going out on strike?

“Yes I do. So that’s what they’re trying to implement here with us? No. We work too hard for this. That’s crap. And if [the UAW] agrees to that ... Well, I’ll leave that alone.”

“I hope everybody’s put some money away, because this is the time we need to do something. Last two decades we’ve been sold out. Twelve years here without a raise. Retirees are getting nothing. We’ve got a husband and wife working in here and they cannot make a living. They live paycheck to paycheck. And then we’ve got the tier system. That’s ridiculous.

“As far as the strike itself, I think either they need to play ball or we need to go.”

WSWS: What do you think about UPS workers who might go on strike?

“I think it’s great. I had a brother-in-law that worked for UPS about 28 years ago, and they went out on strike then and I walked with them. And I’ll do it again.”

“I heard [UAW president Shawn] Fain went to the White House ... Why is [Biden] getting involved in our business? It’s time for us to get what we deserve. The company is getting good money. They take the profit they’ve made and they’re starting battery plants. \$16/hour is what they start out at. What the hell!? I started out almost 30 years ago at \$13. Three

dollars an hour over thirty years?!”

“What once was a good wage is no longer a good wage because we aren’t keeping up with inflation. The other thing is a pension for those of us who don’t have one. Social Security is not going to cut it in 30 years. You’ve got to have something to retire to. 401ks are not stable.”

“We’ve got to get together and stand. We’re the ones who control things if we allow ourselves to be. But that means me standing next to you no matter what our differences are, and saying we’re doing this for each other, not just for me or just for you. That’s what we have to do.”

“With the actors and writers, they’re not making anything off the streaming services. It’s a slightly different fight but the ultimate goal is to be treated fairly for the work you’ve done. You know, UPS, a lot of those guys aren’t getting enough hours to survive no matter what the pay rate it. You work two to four hours a night ... you can’t live off that.”

“The people who created the content need to be treated fairly for what’s made off that content.”

WSWS: And you create the vehicles...

“We create the vehicles that go out the door and put the money in their pockets, that’s right.”



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