

100 days of the writers' strike: What is the way forward?

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For 100 days, some 10,000 writers in the Writers Guild of America (WGA) have been engaged in a battle against the giant corporations that dominate the film, internet streaming and television industry. Braving the hottest summer in modern history, striking writers and their supporters have picketed outside studios and corporate offices in Los Angeles, New York and Chicago, while their co-workers in Australia and the United Kingdom have held rallies in support.

The current strike is now the second longest in the history of the WGA, surpassing the 2007-2008 strike. As was the case in that strike 15 years ago, the studio executives, with billions in assets at their disposal, are more than willing to “bleed out” writers until they “start losing their apartments and losing their houses,” as one executive put it.

The writers were joined one month ago by 65,000 actors, beginning the first “dual strike” by the two sections of workers since 1960. The combined strike of some 76,000 writers and actors is the largest strike in Hollywood film and television history. It could be much larger given that only a fraction of the 161,000-strong SAG-AFTRA membership is currently on strike.

As the strike has gone on and the corporations have dug in their heels, actors and writers have made statements pointing to the broader issues involved.

“It used to be kings and queens and emperors, and now it’s captains of industry,” Alan Ruck of *Succession* said earlier this week. “And they think that the world and everything on it and in it, everything in the air and the ocean belongs to them.” At a July 25 rally in New York, fellow *Succession* star Arian Moayed drew a direct comparison between the fascistic Roy family in the show and the current studio executives. “We deserve to work together to make

beautiful art so people can enjoy it. It’s like these people haven’t seen f***ing *Succession*. It’s about you!”

Leila, a striking actress, told *World Socialist Web Site* reporters last month, “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.”

These statements, and there are many more like them, express a broader sentiment, but it is necessary to draw out the implications.

First, writers and actors are engaged in a *class struggle*, which is pitting them not only against the gigantic media corporations, but behind them the banks and Wall Street, which are demanding an enormous escalation in the exploitation of workers everywhere. A fight against these “captains of industry” and modern-day “kings and queens and emperors” must be waged as a class fight, mobilizing the full strength of the working class.

Indeed, the actors’ and writers’ strike is part of a developing class movement in the US and throughout the world. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics data, cited by *Politico* this week, more than “200,000 workers at large companies participated in work stoppages last month, easily topping the 126,500 that were involved in strikes in the entirety of 2022.”

The soaring cost of living, one of the consequences of escalating war and the bailout of the rich, has sparked social unrest throughout the world this year, from the protests of millions in France, to the strikes of hundreds of thousands in the UK, the strike of dockworkers in Canada and mass protests in Sri Lanka against austerity.

What is blocking the development of these struggles into a united movement of the working class is the trade union apparatus, controlled by individuals in the top 5 or even top 1 percent of the population, which functions as an instrument of isolation and suppression.

In the initial weeks of the strike, many writers and actors were enthusiastic about the prospect of a joint struggle with 340,000 UPS workers, which would have enormously strengthened both sections of the working class. The Teamsters apparatus, however, after first blocking a strike at Yellow Freight that paved the way for the company's bankruptcy, announced a last-minute sellout contract on July 25, which it is currently trying to get workers to approve.

On the West Coast, over 22,000 dockworkers have been without a contract for over 13 months. Yet the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) has yet to hold a strike authorization vote as it conspires behind the scenes to try to get passed an agreement that no worker has seen. Earlier, the ILWU scabbed on the Canadian dockworkers' strike by accepting cargo ships that were diverted to ports in Seattle and San Francisco.

As for WGA and SAG-AFTRA, they have counseled strikers to direct their support to strike-breaking Democratic politicians. The leadership of SAG-AFTRA only called a strike of the actors after a semi-revolt from the membership, in the form of an open letter warning the union officials not to sell out their struggle.

After the strike began, without a single discussion, much less a vote among the membership, the SAG-AFTRA bureaucracy agreed to allow non-Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers studios to apply for "interim agreements." These agreements have provoked an outpouring of anger among striking workers, who rightly see them as a stab in the back.

This brings us to the second point: Every class struggle, as Marx and Engels put it in the *Communist Manifesto*, is a political struggle. That is, it inevitably raises, in the course of its development, the question of power. Who controls society? And in whose interests?

If the ruling class owns everything—perhaps not yet all the oceans and the air—then it is a question of reorganizing society on entirely different lines, where the productive forces of society are not owned by a tiny

fraction of the population but are controlled democratically, on the basis of social need. That is, it is necessary to replace capitalism with socialism.

Writers and actors, along with the working class as a whole, must confront the fact that the entire political establishment exists to represent *one class* in the *class struggle*, namely, the capitalist class. While the Republican Party plumbs the depths of fascism, the Democrats, no less a party of Wall Street, are focused entirely on the escalation of war, now against Russia and soon against China.

Both parties are united in their determination to make the working class pay for the crisis of capitalism, though the Democrats prefer to utilize the services of the union apparatus to assist in the process.

The imperative for a socialist reorganization of economic life is inextricably connected to the future of cultural production itself. If the ruling class has its way, and it is determined to do so, the population will have no art to "enjoy" but propaganda and pabulum. The fight to defend serious artistic work must be infused with and connected to the development of a working class movement against capitalism.

From these points flow two conclusions. First, it is imperative that the strike by writers and actors break free from the constraints imposed upon it by the trade union apparatus. The WWSWS urges television and film workers to form a rank-and-file committee, as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). An urgent appeal must be directed to every section of the working class for a united fight, independent of and in opposition to the trade union apparatus.

Second, this must be connected to a political struggle against the entire state apparatus of the ruling elites and the social system it defends, capitalism. To think that this is possible outside of a mass, *revolutionary* movement of the working class is the most unrealistic form of utopianism. The modern "kings and queens and emperors" will no more willingly give up their wealth and privileges than their predecessors.



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