

WGA for Peace: Opposition mounts among film and television workers to unions' support for Israeli genocide in Gaza

Marc Wells

10 November 2023

As the Writers Guild of America (WGA) was attempting to organize the ratification of a sellout agreement at the beginning of October, the events in the Middle East cracked open a divide between the union bureaucracies, aligned with the warmongering Biden administration, and many rank-and-file writers, actors and directors opposed to the Israeli genocide in Gaza, a crime that has ended the lives of 11,000 Palestinians to date, half of them children.

The immediate and instinctive response of the WGA was uncritical support for US imperialism: “All of us in Guild leadership are horrified by the atrocities committed by Hamas on October 7th,” said WGA West boss Meredith Stiehm, Vice President Michele Mulrone and Treasurer Betsy Thomas in a statement to members.

Striking a similar tone, the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), the actors' union currently concocting a sellout against its own members, asserted: “The [October 7] attack was a fundamental violation of human rights and dignity. There is no justification for the murder and kidnapping of civilians. We mourn the loss of life and urge the safe return of those who are missing and held hostage. We stand united against hatred and violence and pray for peace.”

The Directors Guild of America (DGA) took the prize in historical ignorance, claiming that there was an equal sign between opposition to the fascist policies of ethnic cleansing by Zionism and antisemitism: “The DGA unequivocally condemns terrorism and joins the many voices in our community decrying the recent Hamas terrorist attacks in Israel and violence against innocent civilians,” the statement said. “We stand against the growing spread of antisemitism here in the US and abroad, and remain committed in our actions, words and deeds to supporting the Jewish people.”

Taking these positions places the guilds firmly in the traditions of their union forebears, who in the Cold War period signed up for the anti-communist witch-hunt and eagerly helped the purge of left-wing figures and ideas in Hollywood. The present officials are every bit as cowardly and corrupt as their counterparts in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

More than 330 members of the three unions responded anonymously (for fear of retaliation) by condemning the leaderships' statements, explaining they were

expressing their “concerns regarding the recent pressure campaigns by certain high-profile members of our guilds to issue statements in support of Israel amidst its ongoing siege of Gaza. While we fully appreciate the diversity of opinions within our guilds, we firmly believe that if our guilds release such statements, they must be rooted in a deep commitment to justice and human rights FOR ALL.”

The letter further pointed to the artists' difficult position in a neo-McCarthyite environment: “As storytellers, the narratives we craft matter, and the language we use has consequences. This is especially true in a moment where many of us who stand against genocide cannot even take that bare minimum position publicly without fear of being doxxed or blacklisted. The language others have chosen has cost lives, both here in the U.S. and overseas. Just recently, we tragically witnessed the murder of a six-year-old, Wadea Al-Fayoume, a Palestinian boy in Chicago, a horrifying event that cannot be disconnected from the broader narrative and its consequences.”

A second letter called openly for an immediate ceasefire. It noted that, as “of this writing, our letter bears the initials of over 300 union members across the WGA, DGA and SAG-AFTRA, many of whom are Jewish and most of whom only heard about our letter through word of mouth.”

These principled statements were unacceptable to the Hollywood elite and the union leadership that serves it. *Deadline* published a scurrilous, pro-Zionist attack by writer Michael Seitzman, accusing the opposition of “information management” and attempting to obscure the character of the current campaign of mass murder being carried out by the Israel Defense Forces and the Netanyahu government.

The opposition responded in a thoughtful and measured manner to these slanders, debunking the narrative that the October 7 attack was unprovoked and defining genocide as “a crime committed with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, in whole or *in part*,” (emphasis in original), a definition that applies aptly to Israel's current onslaught in Gaza.

The WSWS reached out to the group, which calls itself “WGA for Peace” and the organization agreed to comment anonymously.

“There were many writers who recognized these [pro-Israeli, official union] statements as fueling a one-sided narrative that would lead to the escalating genocide in Palestine that we're

witnessing today,” the group explained, “and they were specifically sensitive to the fact that if the WGA continued this narrative it would further harm Muslim and Arab members of the union. Individually, these writers began speaking out and connecting with one another.

“It was soon confirmed that the WGA was in fact planning to release a statement despite our earlier efforts,” the WGA for Peace response to our questions went on. “As mostly lower- to mid-level workers, we knew that if we were going to be successful we would have to show collective force publicly. This led to our anonymous open letter. It was clear by then that these issues went beyond stopping a single statement by a single guild, and members of other guilds quickly joined these efforts.”

The organization emphasized the chasm between mass opposition to Zionism and the policies of US imperialism: “There has never been a democratic approach to Palestinian issues. With the support of politicians in both major parties, 34 states have laws on the books infringing upon our first amendment rights and banning the organizing of boycotts targeting Israel. According to one poll, 66% of Americans currently want a ceasefire, yet less than 4% of congress supports it. Meanwhile, there are powerful organizations that exist specifically to harass and silence any critiques of Israel.”

Specifically, “Hollywood in particular is not designed to protect those who speak against the powerful in general, and that needs to change. Just recently, one of the industry’s biggest agents was pushed out of a leadership position for resharing the simple statement: ‘You’re currently learning who supports genocide,’ for example. It’s undeniable that there is now a target on our backs, so we remain anonymous for the purposes of this particular campaign, even as many of us continue to organize around this issue alongside many Jewish siblings in our personal lives.”

What is taking shape is a renewed trend of witch-hunting, which the group correctly characterized as “a new era of McCarthyism”: “Historically, the dangerous censorship of the McCarthy era was used to weaken the power of Hollywood labor unions by using charges of communism to silence union organizers.” WGA for Peace warned that “we must be vigilant to prevent this terrible history from repeating itself, if not for the sake of justice and fairness, then for the sake of protecting the gains we’ve made as a labor movement.”

The attack on freedom of speech is well underway, as “some of our signatories have reported being fired, doxxed, and threatened with blacklisting by powerful industry figures for speaking out on behalf of Palestinians. Others have reported being harassed by superiors for not signing the pro-Israel open letter, and we’ve received threatening emails from some powerful players ourselves.”

The group commented on the filthy role of Democratic Party “lefts” in their support for US imperialism: “There are many factors that contribute to the one-sided support of Israel in our country... At the end of the day, it all comes down to what America needs in order to secure its power in a region that is not so politically aligned with them. What we are seeing is that even our politicians on the left are working to preserve the American empire

at all costs, and the American empire needs Israel as much as Israel needs it.”

WGA for Peace made an important distinction between oppressors and the oppressed: “With billions of US dollars funding the Israeli military industrial complex – the United States has given Israel more aid than any other nation since World War II, granting it more than \$260 billion – there is no doubt in our minds that there is a clear oppressor here, and as US citizens, we are responsible for its actions. According to a 2022 report from Amnesty International, Palestinians are subjected to massive seizures of their land and property, unlawful killings, forcible transfer, drastic movement restrictions, and the denial of nationality and citizenship under Israeli rule. This system has consistently been labeled an apartheid regime under international law. Where there is a military industrial, colonial regime on one side, and a colonized group on the other, there is an unbalanced power dynamic. Palestinians have time and time again tried every other method of resistance, only to be met with more violence.”

In its answers to the WWS, the group shared its concerns about the industry broadly: “The push to specifically condemn Hamas by a group of high-powered showrunners and the subsequent silence over the current actions of the Israeli army are severely one-sided and telling of where we are at in the industry. A lack of support of Israel’s actions and/or any support of the Palestinian cause is immediately labeled as antisemitic, and this lack of nuance in discourse is highly problematic and concerning to us.”

As for the group’s immediate actions, “We are currently calling on the DGA and SAG-AFTRA to retract their statements that amount to the support of Israeli lives over the lives of Palestinians, and we call on all guilds to reaffirm their commitment to protecting every member’s economic and professional position, even or especially if they speak out on behalf of the powerless.”

This is an important development, and we encourage every act of opposition to the mass murder in Gaza and its apologists in Hollywood.



To contact the WWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact