

# Film and television workers need to mobilize now independently of the IATSE and Teamsters union officialdom

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Members of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) remain in the dark about the state of negotiations with the Alliance of Motion Picture & Television Producers (AMPTP). IATSE announced June 6 that no agreement had been reached on either the Basic Agreement (BA), which covers entertainment workers in 13 West Coast IATSE locals, or the Area Standards Agreement (ASA), covering 23 locals and film and television workers across the country. Some 60,000 IATSE members are involved.

Negotiations on the Basic Agreement were paused May 16 to focus on the ASA. Two weeks of talks on the latter ended June 1, also with no agreement. IATSE and the AMPTP then resumed negotiations on the BA, only to once again pause with no deal last week.

Teamsters Local 399 and other craft unions began talks with the AMPTP June 11. Contracts for film and television workers in IATSE, Local 399 and the other Basic Crafts unions (laborers, electricians, plasterers and plumbers) expire July 31. Every union official has sworn publicly that a strike is far from his or her mind. Yet the companies are on the warpath, slashing jobs and reducing production.

IATSE and the other unions say talks have been “productive,” but after three months of negotiations, and several local tentative agreements being inked, workers still have not received any information regarding either the deals that have already been made, or the terms and proposals that the unions have put forward.

In preparing for a struggle this summer, IATSE and Teamsters members and other film and television workers need to understand certain basic realities, and make them the basis of their action. The unions in

question do not represent them. They are extensions of corporate management, linked politically to the Democrats or Republicans, and entirely tied to the present economic set-up. Union officials make enormous salaries and have far more in common with the studio and network executives than they do with electricians, cinematographers, drivers and the rest of the workforce.

The talks are being held behind closed doors because the union leaders are driven by one central motive: to come up with a deal, including a few crumbs if they can get them, that they can “sell” to, i.e., put over on, the membership. The specter of 2021, when IATSE members actually rejected the contract by 50.4 percent but were bamboozled by the union’s undemocratic electoral college-like “delegate system,” still haunts IATSE president Matthew Loeb and company.

IATSE has a history of corruption and class collaboration. When Hollywood ruled the film world, so to speak, the unions were able to negotiate certain gains, based on the fat profits of the studios. The situation has changed dramatically. Today streaming, artificial intelligence and other technologies are being savagely weaponized to destroy jobs. The film and television companies have received their marching orders from Wall Street.

Now, with the “great contraction” taking place, IATSE is less prepared than ever to do battle with the conglomerates. The same holds true for the Teamsters, headed nationally by Sean O’Brien, who bitterly betrayed UPS workers last year, and locally by demagogue Lindsay Dougherty, the favorite of the capitalist media.

The building of rank-and-file committees is a burning

necessity. Such committees, independent of the union bureaucracies' stranglehold, must elaborate not only economic demands, including major wage and pension funding increases and reduction of hours, but social, political and cultural ones. If the film and television industry remains in the hands of corporate sharks it will be artistically destroyed and workers will be thrown back to conditions unseen since the Depression.

IATSE's "communications" with its members, resembling messages from the royal palace to the peasants' huts, are in line with this. Nothing concrete, nothing of substance. Under circumstances where workers face life-and-death issues, they are expected to be satisfied with a union tweet asserting that "Thus far negotiations have largely been productive, with the Basic Negotiating Committee and the studios reaching consensus on a number of issues."

Loeb, who made \$563,529 last year, issued a statement in which he evasively commented, "I want to thank the Basic Negotiating Committee and our union allies for their strength, solidarity, and insight throughout this process. I remain hopeful that our work will result in a tentative agreement that members will want to ratify."

The officialdom is fearful that any contract that it puts together in collision with management behind the backs of workers will be voted down. That is why they refuse to reveal what is in the local agreements they have already negotiated, as well as their demands. They plan to keep the deals secret as long as they possibly can, ultimately giving workers no time to go over the agreements, much less to organize opposition.

IATSE officials have stated time and again they are not interested in extending the contract past the July 31 deadline and that if a deal is still not reached that they "may" call a strike authorization vote.

One has to rub one's eyes. This is a union bureaucracy physically *allergic* to strikes and to struggle. IATSE leaders participated eagerly in the anti-communist "Red Scare" of the 1940s and 1950s under the notorious, ultra-reactionary Roy Brewer. In 1945, IATSE intervened to break up the Conference of Studio Unions and scabbed on a strike of 10,000 film workers.

As *Deadline* noted in 2018, "IATSE, which recently celebrated its 125th anniversary, has never launched an industry-wide strike against Hollywood." The *LA Times* chimed in more recently, "IATSE has never

staged a nationwide strike in its 131-year history." The union's timeline on its own website can only point to a *one-hour* strike in 1952, which they proclaim "was a major breakthrough"!

Nor do IATSE leaders intend to stage a nationwide strike now. In effect, what union officials are doing is giving management extra time by waiting until July 31 to decide whether to announce a strike vote. Everything is calibrated to weaken the workers and strengthen the companies.

As one AMPTP executive stated to *Deadline*, "The real negotiation is no one wants a strike, but we can't seem to get all the pieces together for an agreement that works for everyone."

IATSE and AMPTP are conspiring behind closed doors to force yet another rotten deal on entertainment workers, one that will have a critical impact on their professions. If workers are to fight back then they must do so themselves, and not allow bureaucrats who do not have to work grueling 12, 14, 16 or 18 hour shifts daily stifle their struggle for better working and living conditions.

Again, if entertainment workers are to move forward, the *only option* is the formation of democratically controlled rank-and-file committees independent of both the unions and the capitalist political parties. These committees need to formulate demands and a strategy to win them that includes linking up with other workers in the industry, such as writers and actors who were sold out by their unions during their strikes last year. These committees should also come to the defense of University of California academic workers and students across the country who face state and police repression for opposing the Gaza genocide. All those who are interested in building rank-and-file committees should contact us today by filling out the form below.



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