

# Film industry job losses, the bankruptcy of the unions and the fight for rank-and-file committees

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The jobs bloodbath in the US film industry continues. FilmLA reported April 14 that first-quarter film and television production in Los Angeles this year suffered a dramatic 22 percent decline from the same three months in 2024. “Shoot Days” (SD) fell from 6,823 a year ago to 5,295 in January-March 2025.

The official film office of the City and County of Los Angeles noted that every one of the major categories that it follows experienced a decline. Commercials came the closest to breaking even, with only a 2.1 percent year-to-year decline in SD.

A 6.2 percent increase in production, to 5,860 shoot days, in the fourth quarter of 2024 compared to the same period the year before had given rise to a certain optimism. However, overall, last year witnessed a significant decline in SD, to 23,480, a 5.6 percent drop from 2023, making 2024 the “second least productive year observed by FilmLA.” 2020, when film and television were devastated by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, was the least productive.

The decline in 2024 from 2023 was all the more significant given that members of both the Writers Guild of America (WGA) and the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) undertook lengthy strikes in 2023—the writers’ strike lasting 148 days, the actors’ strike 118.

The FilmLA report insisted that the first-quarter falloff in 2025 was not a result of the devastating fires that engulfed portions of the Los Angeles area in January:

The wildfires that devastated the Pacific Palisades and Altadena communities had only a small effect on L.A. area filming. A recent FilmLA analysis determined that combined, these areas had hosted 1,405 Shoot Days over the past four years—or roughly 1.3 percent of all regional filming. Approximately 545 unique filming locations fell within the fires’ burn zones. At the order of the City and County, burn areas remain off-limits.

FilmLA VP of Integrated Communications Philip Sokoloski elaborated, asserting that the “fires sent many productions scrambling to reschedule shoots and displaced hundreds of industry workers from their homes. But their impact on local filming levels appears to have been temporary.”

The sharpest and most startling expression of the plunge in shoot days is found in television production. FilmLA reports:

As the largest and hardest-hit segment of L.A.’s film production economy, declines in Television carry wide employment repercussions. Television production peaked in Greater Los Angeles in 2021 at 18,560 annual Shoot Days. With just 7,716 Shoot Days logged in 2024, annual Television production declined by *58.4 percent* in just three years. [Emphasis added.]

The total number of SD for television drama fell again in the first quarter of 2025, down 38.9 percent from the same three months a year ago, to just 440. “Meanwhile, TV Comedy production declined 29.9 percent to 110 SD, and TV Reality declined 26.4 percent to 969 SD.”

FilmLA’s report on sound stage-based production [large-scale film or television studio production], released April 3, points to the same devastating general trends. The use of such spaces in the Los Angeles area, which had on average held in the 90th percentile from 2016 through 2022, declined sharply after that year. “In 2023,” the study explains, “average regional studio occupancy declined to 69 percent. It weakened further over the ensuing twelve months, declining to 63 percent in 2024.”

Episodic television has been especially hard hit. FilmLA points out that whereas such TV series, which it describes as “particularly high-value, job producing forms of production,” had accounted for 30 percent of all production on “certified stages and backlots in L.A.” in recent years, it now comprises only 20 percent, a drop by *one-third*.

In the face of economic devastation, the entertainment unions have shown their corporatist, class collaborationist character, lining up with the giant studios, networks and Democratic Party politicians in the “Stay in LA” campaign.

The strategy of IATSE, SAG-AFTRA, WGA, Teamsters and the rest is nationalist, parochial and pro-capitalist.

IATSE Vice President Michael F. Miller Jr. published an article in *Deadline* in February that exemplifies the union bureaucracies’ response:

Productions leaving California, unfortunately, is not news. But in light of the devastation caused by the Palisades and Eaton wildfires, we need to take additional steps to keep production and jobs here....

Without a doubt, the best recovery contribution that any of the studios can make is to ensure that they’re providing local work

and producing content here in California.

Don't pledge a dollar amount. Pledge a percentage of your content will be produced here in Hollywood for the next five years....

Industry leaders know that we have to make California more competitive as other jurisdictions continue to lure our jobs away with their incentives.

This is the same outlook that has contaminated the United Auto Workers and other industrial unions and has led to nothing but disaster, as one section of the working class is pitted against another in the name of the battle for "competitiveness." It is a race to the bottom. Inevitably, the industry comes along and demands concessions "to keep jobs" in this or that location.

The outlook of Miller and the other union officials is that California film workers' jobs should be preserved at the expense of workers in Atlanta, New York, New Mexico, Vancouver and Toronto. So much for "solidarity," the watchword the unions trot out at holiday events. When it comes down to it, IATSE and the rest subscribe to the "dog-eat-dog" philosophy that the capitalists live by. For workers, the results of such a pragmatic, opportunist view are always catastrophic. It doesn't "save jobs" and merely makes workers the plaything of the employers.

On April 14, according to the *Hollywood Reporter*,

The specter of Los Angeles becoming another Detroit, a city built on a specific industry that became a shell of its former self when that business moved out, loomed over a compelling film and TV industry town hall that tackled not only the calamitous drop in production in Hollywood and California, but also the fight to get the state to increase its entertainment production tax incentive.

In fact, such a meeting could not possibly face up to either the economic or cultural truth about Hollywood's present malaise.

The constant production of noisy and stupid comic book movies and their sequels and a reliance on "blockbusters" are pieces of the problem. This trend helped lead to a decline in theater attendance, which was then sharply accelerated by COVID-19. Currently theater attendance stands at around 24 percent of pre-pandemic levels.

The sole response of the studio conglomerates and other industry insiders and the unions is to demand an increase in tax incentives from the state government, i.e., to pour more money into the pockets of massive companies. As the WSWS explained in December 2024:

These tax breaks, however, are anything but the beneficent measures they are advertised to be. In reality, they represent another example of the government funneling public funds into the coffers of wealthy corporations while workers and local communities bear the brunt of austerity and exploitation.

A 360-page report by the PFM Group, commissioned by New York's Department of Taxation and Finance and released in January 2024, found that the state's Film Production Credit "does not provide

a positive return." Production activity and hiring attributed to the credit generates a combined total of just 31 cents in direct and indirect revenues for every dollar New York pays producers.

The Philadelphia-based financial advisory firm concluded that based "on an objective weighing of the costs and benefits, the film production credit is at best a break-even proposition and more likely a net cost to NYS."

The "Stay in LA" campaign is entirely selfish and directed against film industry workers organizing themselves independently of the studios and politicians. Under the slogan "There's no place like home," its initiative declares

Add your name to this petition if you believe that when production stays in LA, the city thrives. Each signature could mean a difference in whether or not a family can afford to #StayinLA and remain a part of our beautiful community.

Again, what about workers and families in other "beautiful communities"? Should they starve?

An April 6 "Stay in LA" rally was addressed by SAG-AFTRA secretary-treasurer Joely Fisher, who demagogically told the crowd, "This is Hollywood, California. We have to stay competitive to stay alive, to keep our industry alive, to keep tourism alive, to keep the entire ecosystem alive ... Make Hollywood Hollywood again!"

DeJon Ellis Jr., an IATSE local business manager, claimed that "we are not just creating entertainment, we are creating jobs, we are sustaining families, we are shaping the identity of California itself." And Lindsay Dougherty, according to the *Hollywood Reporter*, the leader of the Hollywood Teamsters, also "compared Hollywood to her hometown of Detroit before the auto manufacturers went into crisis."

These officials are grossly betraying the workers they claim to speak for. The fight for jobs and decent incomes *and* for serious, quality filmmaking requires a head-on struggle against the existing economic, political and cultural set-up, not subordinating workers to it. The source of all the problems is capitalism and its insatiable drive for profit. The film and entertainment industries are held in the death grip of giant conglomerates and Wall Street financial firms. The unions fully accept that and are thus incapable of defending a single job or long-acquired gain. They will give up everything at the beck and call of the corporations.

Workers in Hollywood need to unite with film workers in Vancouver, New Mexico, Chicago, New York, Atlanta, Toronto and Europe, and Asia too, against the financial oligarchy. A starting point in the fight for jobs is the building of rank-and-file committees in every locale that can begin to exchange information and prepare a strategy to fight the job destruction and all that comes with it.



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