

Entertainment unions campaign for \$750 million handout to California corporations

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The passage of increased funding, now three-quarters of a billion dollars, for the misnamed California Film and Television Jobs Program (also known as the California Film & Television Tax Credit Program) has led to an orgy of self-congratulatory back-patting by entertainment union officials. These organizations supported and campaigned for the massive corporate handouts through the union-financed “Keep California Rolling” campaign.

The entertainment unions, notably the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), Teamsters, Writers Guild of America West (WGA), American Federation of Musicians (AFM) and Directors Guild of America (DGA), banded together to help push through the tax breaks that will benefit some of the world’s largest conglomerates.

They formed the Entertainment Union Coalition (EUC) on February 27 this year, officially launching the Keep California Rolling campaign. Its webpage asserts that the

EUC is committed to protecting and advancing the economic livelihoods, health and pension benefits, workplace safety, organizing rights, and creative interests of its members.

This is a nauseating, corporatist lie. First of all, the well-heeled union officials have explicitly marshaled themselves for measures that will operate at *the direct expense* of their members in other states (and in Canada in some cases). While SAG-AFTRA is based in Los Angeles, IATSE’s headquarters is in New York, as is the AFM’s. The DGA, headquartered in Los Angeles, has a satellite office in New York, which, it should be noted, has been campaigning for “substantial improvements to the [New York] state’s Film & Television Incentive.” And although the WGA West and WGA East are separate unions, they are affiliated and negotiate their contracts together.

In the most immediate sense, why in the world should any workers outside southern California continue to pay dues to these treacherous outfits, which are openly campaigning for the destruction of their jobs?

Of course, SAG-AFTRA, IATSE and the rest, as their miserable record proves, are just as incapable of defending employment in *Hollywood*. They are simply guaranteeing publicly that they will accept any concession, any cuts in wages and benefits, to “save” jobs. As such whipsawing in the auto and other industries has demonstrated, this is a recipe for workers to be pitted against one another in a race to the bottom, while the companies lick their chops and count the cash.

The unions have spent countless hours (and members’ dollars) promoting the claim that the California Film and Television Jobs Program will be a boon to workers in that state. The program is a tax credit program under which the state government hands a percentage of the monies spent on production back to the corporations. In addition, Assembly Bill 1138, also supported by the EUC, would raise the tax credit from 20 percent to 35 percent, increasing the amounts paid to individual corporations.

As the WSWWS argued in December,

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.

We have also explained that no serious study indicates that such tax breaks benefit workers in any meaningful or long-term manner. Study after study has shown that these tax incentive programs do little or nothing to boost the number of jobs, or the actual income of workers.

In April, we pointed out,

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 total of just 31 cents in direct and indirect revenues for every dollar the state of New York (NYS) 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.

Many studies have indicated that rather than creating new production opportunities, tax incentives merely shift production from one location to another. In other words, the EUC is *actively* working against its membership in other locales.

This makes an obvious and disgraceful mockery of the official AFL-CIO slogan of "solidarity." Every union official who signed on to this campaign, including those who showed up to fawn at the feet of Gov. Gavin Newsom at a July 2 news conference, should be branded as traitors.

These moves to assist the conglomerates occur as the entertainment industry continues to hemorrhage jobs. Last Friday, the *Hollywood Reporter* commented on the WGA West's 2024 annual financial report, which showed a drop of employment from 2022 to 2023 (the latter was the year of an extended strike) and then again from 2023 to 2024.

According to the news report,

The employment declines were steepest in television and digital platforms as well as in news, promotion, informational and interactive programming. Television and digital platform writer employment dropped nearly 11 percent between 2023 and 2024 and 28.5 percent from 2022. The WGA West represents thousands of writers in that category; on a smaller scale, news, promotion, informational and interactive programming writers

dropped from 108 in 2022 to 94 in 2023 to 80 in 2024, a decline of nearly 26 percent.

Even the studies cited by those who support the California Film and Television Jobs Program forecast job creation that is little more than a drop in a rapidly leaking bucket. They assert that doubling the corporate subsidies to \$750 million will only provide 4,400 to 5,500 new jobs. According to the unions which make up the EUC, over 17,000 jobs have been lost since 2022, and that is based on information from the Motion Picture Industry Pension and Health Plan. In other words, it does not include those who do not qualify for benefits.

Only 12.7 percent of SAG-AFTRA members qualified for medical benefits last year, while the percentage qualifying for pensions is estimated to be 14 percent (as SAG-AFTRA and many other entertainment unions, deservedly ashamed, do not make the figure public).

Adding injury to insult, SAG-AFTRA officials in a May 29, 2025 news update on their website, headlined "ACT NOW: Save CA Film & TV Jobs," claim that the California Film and Television Jobs Program "Protects workers—it includes a world leading safety framework." They provide no evidence to support this. How corporate tax incentives will improve the safety of those who regularly work 12-, 14-, 16- and even 18-hour shifts remains a mystery.

Entertainment workers need to break out of the straitjacket imposed on them by the unions, which actively strangle every rank-and-file initiative. These outfits act as agents of management, without a shred of genuine democracy—or even decency! No self-respecting "workers organization" would campaign for billions of dollars for the employers *and* the destruction of other workers' jobs!

The way out of this impasse is through the mobilization of entertainment industry workers through the building of democratically controlled rank-and-file committees independent of the union bureaucracies and management, and the two parties of big business. Only in this way, by joining their struggles with those of workers in other industries and other locales, will film and television workers be able to organize an effective struggle against the giant conglomerates and the corporate oligarchy as a whole.



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