

Trump's renewed threat of 100 percent tariffs on foreign films: An attack on culture and the working class

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On Monday, President Donald Trump once again threatened to impose a 100 percent tariff on all films made outside the United States, in a rant on his Truth Social platform. His latest declaration exposes the authoritarian character of his administration and points toward the devastating impact such policies will have on workers in the US and internationally.

“Our movie making business has been stolen from the United States of America, by other Countries, just like stealing ‘candy from a baby,’” Trump wrote. “California, with its weak and incompetent Governor, has been particularly hard hit. Therefore, in order to solve this long time, never ending problem, I will be imposing a 100% Tariff on any and all movies that are made outside of the United States. Thank you for your attention to this matter.”

The notion that the film business has been “*stolen* from the United States of America” is reactionary, incendiary nonsense, an attempt to play on the most backward, chauvinistic sentiments.

This is not the first time Trump has floated such a policy. In May 2025 he threatened to impose similar tariffs but never followed through with a formal measure.

His renewed demand comes under conditions of intensified domestic repression. With the militarization of Portland, preceded by the occupation of Washington D.C. and federal operations like “Excalibur” in Los Angeles, the scaffolding for police-military dictatorship in America has already been erected.

Tariffs are regressive taxes that fall most heavily on the working class. A 100 percent tariff on films would not revive Hollywood's declining fortunes, nor would it generate secure jobs for entertainment workers. Instead, it would raise ticket prices while cutting into studio budgets and inviting retaliatory measures from other countries, intensifying global tensions.

Industry analysts have already warned that such a move could backfire, driving up costs for studios and consumers

alike, and reducing employment opportunities for US workers engaged in international productions. After Trump's announcement, stock prices of Warner Bros. Discovery and Netflix dropped.

Even if implemented, tariffs cannot alter the fundamental reality of worldwide production. The film industry, like auto, steel and technology, is globally integrated. Major studios have for decades outsourced filming, post-production, scoring and animation to cheaper foreign markets, from Vancouver and Toronto to Mexico City, Prague and Seoul.

The crisis of the American film industry is profound. In California, film and television workers have endured a steep contraction in employment. In the first quarter of 2025, shoot days in the Los Angeles region plummeted 22 percent compared to 2024.

The second quarter brought only a partial reprieve: a total of 5,394 shoot days, down 6.2 percent from a year earlier. Feature film production was especially devastated, dropping 21.4 percent year over year, even if somewhat improved compared to Q1's collapse. Television production registered growth, but commercial production declined by more than 15 percent.

While Trump cynically scapegoats foreign competition, Democratic officials like Governor Gavin Newsom peddle their own reactionary “solutions.”

Newsom rushed to posture as Trump's chief opponent, responding on X with the quip, “PAY MORE AND ENJOY NOTHING. That's Donald Trump's America.” Yet Newsom has consistently sought to collaborate with Trump and the entertainment corporations. He previously called on the administration to expand California's \$750 million film and television tax credit program into a national incentive scheme.

California's tax credits are marketed as tools to fight “runaway production” to states like Georgia, New Mexico and New York, or to Canadian hubs. But the beneficiaries are the studios, which pocket millions in public subsidies

while continuing to cut jobs, outsource production and impose deteriorating working conditions. Newsom's reaction to Trump is not opposition but an appeal to big business for a more efficient mechanism to defend corporate profits.

Trump's tariff threat is part of his administration's escalating assault on culture, art and political dissent. Throughout his presidency, Trump has denounced public cultural institutions, cutting funding for the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities and seeking to eliminate public broadcasting.

He derided pandemic emergency funds for the Kennedy Center as "wasteful," then intervened to impose state-sanctioned programming against "degenerate art." He targeted the Smithsonian for addressing racism and inequality, labeling such exhibits "toxic propaganda." His so-called "National Garden of American Heroes," along with his "Making Federal Architecture Beautiful Again" executive order epitomize his aim to enforce patriotic kitsch while censoring any critical or oppositional voices.

The proposed tariffs extend this authoritarian agenda to film and television. By restricting the import of foreign films, Trump would not only increase costs for American audiences but also limit access to international art and culture. Such a measure would prevent exposure to creative contributions from abroad that enrich the consciousness of working people. The American ruling class, fearful of social opposition, seeks to keep the population culturally and politically isolated.

Trump's recent vilification of comedian Jimmy Kimmel reveals the administration's determination to silence dissent and punish even limited expressions of opposition in the cultural sphere.

The entertainment unions have thrown their lot in with the corporations and the state. The Entertainment Union Coalition (EUC)—comprising IATSE, SAG-AFTRA, the Directors Guild, Teamsters Local 399 and Laborers Local 724—fully supports Newsom's tax credit giveaways to the studios.

In May, the unions went further, co-signing with far-right actor Jon Voight a letter to Trump himself, pledging their willingness to cooperate with his administration. Voight, who has openly promoted Trump's fascistic policies, has been reported as one of the inspirations for the tariff scheme.

On Tuesday, Teamsters President Sean O'Brien announced his embrace of Trump's foreign film tariffs, revealing the union bureaucracy's character in full: as collaborators with fascistic nationalism.

O'Brien and his union allies are fully integrating into corporatism as partners in a system that pits workers of different countries against each other, ensuring that the

working class is subordinated to dictatorship and global capitalist exploitation.

The attempt to use tariffs to reshape the film industry sets a precedent for further authoritarian interventions into cultural life. It comes as the Supreme Court prepares to review presidential tariff authority under the International Emergency Powers Act.

Movies are currently exempted from such authority, highlighting the dubious legality of Trump's proposal. Yet the broader trajectory is unmistakable: the drive to concentrate dictatorial powers in the hands of the presidency, under conditions of mounting social and economic crisis.

Trump's announcement is a serious warning. The working class cannot place any confidence in the Democratic Party or the unions, both of which have demonstrated their complicity with Trump's agenda. The defense of jobs, wages and cultural freedom requires the independent organization of workers themselves.

Film, television and cultural workers must take the initiative to form rank-and-file committees, independent of the pro-corporate unions and both big-business parties. These committees must link the struggle of entertainment workers with those of autoworkers, educators, logistics workers and the entire working class, which confronts the same attacks in every sector. The fight against censorship, repression and economic exploitation is inseparable from the fight against the capitalist system itself.

The global character of film production expresses the international character of the working class. To defend their interests, workers in the US must unite with their counterparts in Canada, Europe, Latin America and Asia. The alternative to Trump's reactionary nationalism is not Newsom's corporatism but a socialist program: placing culture, as with all of society's resources, under the democratic control of the working class, to serve human need and artistic development rather than private profit.



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