

The Great Hollywood Contraction continues and deepens

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The latest report from FilmLA, the official film office of the City and County of Los Angeles, on film and television activity in the Los Angeles area shows another sharp year-over-year decline in production in the third quarter (July-September) of 2025. This marks the fourth straight year of declining shoot days (SD)—days of principal photography for a film or television production—in the Los Angeles area. (Statistics were not kept for 2020 due to the initial shuttering of the industry because of the COVID pandemic).

The *Hollywood Reporter* comments: “Production in Los Angeles has reached another all-time low, a new nadir that will either be a diving board to continuing, deep-rooted erosion or an inflection point in the recovery of the region’s film industry.”

FilmLA reports that the number of shoot days in the third quarter of 2025 was 4,380 across all categories, marking a 13.2 percent drop from the previous year, when SD were 5,048, which was itself a decrease from 5,311 SD in 2023. For the same quarter in 2022 the number was 9,066, while in 2021 the figure was 10,127.

The decline in shooting days for the third quarter year-over-year was not an isolated phenomenon, as there has been such a decline in SD over each quarter in 2025, with the first quarter declining from 6,823 shoot days last year to 5,295 this year, and the second quarter declining from 5,749 last year to 5,394 this year.

Of all the categories covered by the FilmLA report, only Feature production and TV Comedy saw an increase in SD July to September, 9.7 and 41.1 percent respectively. All other categories saw a decline, with Television overall declining by 20.7 percent. TV Dramas were down 19 percent, TV Pilots down 34.5 percent, Commercial production was down 17.9

percent, while the “Other” category which “includes still photo shoots, student films, documentaries, short films, online content, plus music and industrial videos, achieved 1,749 SD, for a decline of -9.9 percent compared to the same period last year.”

Reel 360 notes that “the quarter’s charts underscore how far below trend LA remains: versus the five-year average (excluding 2020), Television sits down 57.9%, Features down 30.4%, Commercials down 38.8%, and the “Other” bucket (still/photo, docs, shorts, online, music/industrial) down 29.7%.”

These are devastating figures, behind which lie thousands and thousands of lost jobs, ruined careers and increasingly harsh economic conditions for many.

The response of the industry to the ongoing disaster is to plead for more tax credits, incentives and subsidies from the California state government. The corporatist and parochial entertainment unions have joined this campaign, calling on the studios to “Stay in LA,” tying themselves to the tail of the conglomerates and ignoring the interests of film and television workers across the country and beyond.

The grim report from FilmLA comes on the heels of a letter sent out last week by the newly elected Screen Actors Guild–American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) president Sean Astin. The communication essentially acknowledged the union bureaucracy’s complicity in the ability of the studios and networks to use artist’s personas without permission.

Astin admitted, “Our contracts bind only signatory employers. They can’t stop A.I. developers from scraping performances off the internet or from training models on decades of film and television without permission.”

He then went on to outline specific measures the

union is pursuing in order to limit the use of AI, including supporting the No Fakes Act that would supposedly prohibit the use of unauthorized digital replicas. However, SAG-AFTRA has already allowed AI companies to do exactly that, for example, when they negotiated a deal with Replica studios behind the backs of workers, and without allowing workers to vote on the terms of the contract. The deal involved licensing actors' voices for use in the development of video games.

The SAG-AFTRA leadership, when confronted by its members' anger, hid behind the claim the companies could do nothing in regard to collecting voices or faces without the "informed consent" of performers themselves. This informed consent that SAG-AFTRA peddles is mere snake oil. Not in some imaginary universe where actors and studios have equal power, but in the *real one*, where hard-pressed actors are up against some of the biggest companies in the world, the right to refuse consent—except for big-name performers—will be the equivalent of resigning from the industry.

The SAG-AFTRA leadership is perfectly well aware of this fact, but it does not stop them from claiming that the informed consent of its members is a panacea in the face of the increasing use of AI and the elimination of whole sectors of the entertainment industry workforce. In this way, the union simply reveals its acceptance of the corporate status quo and its own utter impotence. It has no plan to fight for jobs and no ability to do so. With sighs and complaints, SAG-AFTRA and the rest of the union leaderships will accept everything the billionaires have in store for film and television workers.

Artificial Intelligence is a revolutionary technology, with enormous and valuable implications. If its use were subordinated to the democratic control of workers themselves, it would entail a vast increase in both the quality and quantity of artistic production. Under capitalism, however, its use will bring a further lowering of both the quality and quantity of productions, as can already be seen from the SD numbers that have been posted, quarter after quarter, year after year, since its implementation has begun in earnest.

The solution does not lie in billions of dollars more in tax credits for the corporations, nor in a dog-eat-dog

competition for a dwindling number of productions between different locations. For workers to escape this downward spiral, they must break free from the stranglehold of the union bureaucracy that tethers artists to the corporations and the big business parties. It is only through the independent mobilization of the artists themselves in democratically controlled rank-and-file committees that the "Great Contraction" can be fought and reversed.



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