

Writers Guild of America West staff union moves to shut down strike

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27 March 2026

The strike against the Writers Guild of America West (WGAW) by 115 employees, members of the Writers Guild Staff Union (WGSU), part of the Pacific Northwest Staff Union, is more than five weeks old. According to the WGSU, it is one of the longest strikes by union staff in US history.

The contempt with which the Writers Guild treats its own employees speaks to the relationship more generally between the various well-heeled union officialdoms and the rank-and-file: an implacably hostile one. The rights and living standards of the rank-and-file are incompatible with the privileges and pro-corporate existence and outlook of the union apparatus.

On Thursday, the WGSU addressed WGAW executive director Ellen Stutzman with what it described as a “strike-ending” proposal. Given the track record of the unions, including the WGSU-PNWSU itself, WGAW staff have every reason to be suspicious.

In its press release, the WGSU union accused the Guild leadership of having “chosen a war path with its own employees,” noting that the strike has collided with the broader negotiations between writers and the Hollywood studios. Staff have moved their picketing to the SAG-AFTRA building, where the Writers Guild of America East and West are bargaining jointly with the AMPTP, underscoring the proximity of this struggle to wider conflicts in the industry.

The militant tone of the press release is fraudulent. The substance of the union’s proposal reveals it is preparing to end the strike by making concessions. “Enough is enough. The time to enter a fair deal with your staff and reunite is now,” the WGSU declares. It continues: “Attached to this letter you will find a significantly revised contract proposal, in management’s desired ordering and formatting, that is intended to bring this strike to a close.”

The union further states that if no agreement is reached soon, it will support moving the dispute into arbitration within 60 days. In other words, the leadership is prepared to place the issues in the hands of a supposedly “impartial”

third party, i.e., a management-government-controlled process. This is both cowardly and reactionary. If the WGSU is not able to force its members to accept rotten terms, it will turn that job over to an arbitrator.

The union asserts that its new proposal “addresses both the concerns management has expressed and the core matters our membership is fighting for on the picket line.” The approach itself is telling, beginning as it does with management’s “concerns.”

The WGSU explains that it is seeking

- A measure of predictability in job transfer and promotion,
- Employment security with regard to layoff and recall,
- A legal no-strike clause that does not insist on a permissive subject of bargaining, and
- A union-standard wage and salary scale that provides regular and predictable pay progression.

Quite frankly, if the WGAW management were to accept these points, it would be largely accepting hot air. What management is not prepared to promise “a measure of predictability,” “employment security” and other such things, none of which mean anything when the employer, a union in this case, declares that exceptional conditions prevail? A no-strike clause that prevents workers from striking on any issue except wages, hours or working conditions is always both a straitjacket and a weapon in management’s pocket.

The WGAW staff have put up a principled fight, winning the support of many rank-and-file Writers Guild members. But like every other union, including the WGAW itself, the WGSU accepts fully the economic status quo and the subordination of its members’ interests to what the employer can supposedly afford.

As we have noted, the dispute has highlighted stark

inequality within the Guild's staff structure. While most employees earn modest pay amid rising living costs, senior administrators receive executive-level salaries. The WGAW's Stutzman earns approximately \$682,692 annually, with other top officials making between \$399,000 and \$468,000.

The WGSU "strike-ending" proposal is the beginning of a concerted effort to shut down the strike, in the final analysis, on management's terms.

This capitulation is part of a broader pattern of betrayals unfolding across Los Angeles and nationally. Educators and classified school workers in Los Angeles are on the brink of strike action amid deepening attacks on public education.

Kaiser nurses have just been pushed through a major sellout agreement, despite widespread opposition, demonstrating once again the role of union bureaucracies in suppressing resistance. At the University of California, graduate student workers face the threat of a similar outcome, as the United Auto Workers apparatus attempts to force through a tentative agreement over the objections of rank-and-file workers.

These struggles are all being contained, diverted, isolated or shut down through the same mechanisms now on display in the WGSU counterproposal: mediation, arbitration, limited demands and the suppression of independent action.

The proposal makes clear that unresolved disputes will be funneled into structured processes culminating, if necessary, in binding arbitration. The strike, which derives its force from disruption and collective action, is being replaced by a system in which outcomes are determined within limits acceptable to management.

The same logic governs the proposal's treatment of wages. Rather than advancing demands that reflect the cost-of-living crisis in Los Angeles or the central role of staff in the functioning of the Guild, the union has confined itself to marginal increases that remain firmly within the framework established by management.

WGA West has offered a base salary of \$57,000, up from the current poverty-level \$43,000, alongside a 3 percent increase in August 2025, a further 4 percent retroactive to January 2026 and annual raises of 4 percent in years two and three. The WGSU counterproposal differs only slightly, proposing a minimum salary of \$59,737.60 (a pittance in Los Angeles), with a 5 percent increase in the first year, followed by 5 percent in the second year.

A similar retreat is evident in relation to benefits and workplace protections. Even where differences remain on paper, such as retirement contributions, the union has abandoned any strategy to actually win them, reducing these demands to negotiable details within a process geared toward settlement.

The issues that drove the strike, including job security, the use of artificial intelligence and protections against arbitrary treatment, are being softened and folded into a framework dominated by negotiation and arbitration.

Importantly, the proposal isolates the WGSU struggle from the broader movement of workers in the entertainment industry and beyond. This is taking place as negotiations between the WGA and the studios intensify, as SAG-AFTRA faces its own contract battles, and as the industry undergoes profound restructuring driven by streaming and artificial intelligence.

Under these conditions, the objective basis exists for a unified struggle linking staff, writers and performers. Instead, the WGSU leadership has confined the dispute to a narrow institutional framework and is moving to shut it down before it can intersect with wider conflicts.

The no-strike clause enforces this isolation by preemptively banning solidarity action. WGSU members would be barred from participating in broader strike movements, even as conditions across the industry deteriorate. This is significant on the eve of a potential strike by WGA and SAG-AFTRA members.

More fundamentally, this is taking place under conditions of an intensifying offensive against the working class. The Trump administration is escalating its attacks through war, support for genocide, sweeping social cuts, mass layoffs and ongoing assaults on healthcare and culture. The resources of society are being redirected toward militarism and repression, while workers are told to accept concessions in the name of "stability" and "realism."

Under these conditions, the attempt to confine the WGSU struggle to a narrow dispute is itself a form of political disarmament. The issues at stake are not simply wages or benefits, but the broader question of power: who controls the conditions of work and the vast resources of the entertainment industry, and in whose interests they are used.

The fact that this is a "union against a union" conflict only underscores the reality that these organizations function not as instruments of worker control, but as bureaucratic structures integrated into management and the state. When confronted with genuine struggle, they intervene to contain and suppress it.



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