

More than 3 months of video game performers' strike

SAG-AFTRA leadership continues to betray workers in the entertainment industry

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As the strike of video game performers in the US enters its fourth month, the leadership of the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) is keeping the details of the first three days of bargaining with the video game conglomerates in almost a year shrouded in secrecy.

According to the SAG-AFTRA officials, they sat down with the “employer unit which includes Activision Productions Inc., Blindlight LLC, Disney Character Voices Inc., Electronic Arts Productions Inc., Formosa Interactive LLC, Insomniac Games Inc., Llama Productions LLC, Take 2 Productions Inc., and WB Games Inc. on Oct. 23.”

That, along with a statement that the strike “began in July,” was the entirety of the entertainment union’s press release, except for a reference to the fact that “negotiations with employers would continue, with new dates to be announced as soon as they are confirmed.” A spokesperson for the conglomerates, for his part, asserted the two sides had reached agreement on “24 out of 25 proposals.”

SAG-AFTRA officials have insisted from the outset that every issue has been resolved to their satisfaction except for the use of artificial intelligence (AI). In other words, such critical issues as residuals or meaningful raises—much less the defense of jobs—will have to wait until the *next* round of negotiations. Workers should not hold their collective breath.

Disney and some of the other major companies continue to refuse to make even the nominal concessions union officials feel they have to have to sell a deal to the membership.

On the eve of the resumption of negotiations, the union announced that in the previous month they had signed an additional 40 interim interactive media agreements

(IIMA) or tiered-budget independent interactive agreements, bringing the total number of projects allowed to continue during the strike to more than 120.

These deals are being agreed to and imposed in an entirely undemocratic manner. The negotiations are not only carried out behind closed doors, but even the fact they are going on is kept secret until the deals are put to ink. And once they are, workers are not given the opportunity to vote on them. They are effectively decrees from the union tops that dictate the maximum terms of any deal with the “employer unit.”

This is an unprecedented means of settling a strike, piecemeal and by stealth. Essentially, the union is establishing a *ceiling* on which the rank-and-file voice performers have had absolutely no say.

Unions in the US are continuing to demonstrate that they are now arms of management and servants of the government. The UAW’s “historic” (in fact, infamous) “stand-up strike” last year kept 80 percent of autoworkers on the job, resulting in a sellout contract and now mass layoffs and plant closures in that industry.

The SAG-AFTRA approach also resembles the current strategy of the rail union bureaucrats, who are passing as many separate deals as possible before national bargaining begins next month, effectively imposing a national deal through the back door.

Meanwhile, the current disaster in film production and jobs shows no signs of letting up. Doom and gloom dominates the trade publications. FilmLA just issued a report revealing that Shoot Days (SD) in Greater Los Angeles had dropped by 5 percent in the third quarter over the same period in 2023 to 5,048, making it the second slowest summer since the organization began keeping records. Film production in the summer of 2024 was down from the year before, a “surprising” fact seeing

as that period saw a “dual” strike by SAG-AFTRA film and television actors and the Writers Guild of America (WGA)!

The video game industry in the US itself has seen the loss of over 23,000 jobs in the last year, according to a conservative estimate. And despite the admonitions to “play fair” by SAG-AFTRA lead negotiator Duncan Crabtree-Ireland (at \$1.02 million annually, the ninth-highest paid union official in the US), the conglomerates will use the jobs massacre taking place to force “informed consent” on video game performers.

Informed consent is the sticking point for the union tops. Forcing workers to consent to the extermination of their jobs is the solution of the union leaders and the only thing they are demanding from the companies, as evidenced by the IIMAs that have been signed and the template they provide on their website.

SAG-AFTRA does not even bother to enforce the terms of the contracts it brings back. And in this case, the terms of the deals that have been signed and which are on the table with the employer unit will have an existential effect on the jobs of video game performers.

They will force workers to negotiate the terms of their employment on an individual basis, compelling everyone who wants to work—apart from a few A-List performers—to sign whatever is put in front of them or find work in a different industry.

As the WWSWS has pointed out before, nothing in any of the contracts signed by SAG-AFTRA, or anything in the IIMA, provides any genuine protection for workers or even serious oversight mechanisms to ensure that games or corporations do not misuse the identities or likenesses of performers.

The union bureaucrats in SAG-AFTRA have done what they can to sabotage the struggle of video game performers for a better life just as they did previously for film and television actors, as evidenced by the massive slowdown in Shoot Days not just in Los Angeles but throughout the country.

The previous video game contract expired almost two years ago, yet workers were told to continue working. A strike vote was held last year at the height of the joint strike in the film and television industry. Yet despite an almost unanimous vote in favor, workers were kept on the job at what would have been the height of their strength. Even after negotiations broke down, the union recently revealed that there have been no negotiations since November 2023, and workers were kept on the job.

Not until after the International Alliance of Theatrical

Stage Employees (IATSE) brought home a sellout deal for its members did SAG-AFTRA (ensured of the complete isolation of its membership) choose to go out on strike. Yet, even after calling a strike, they have only picketed one company at a time, once a week, for a few hours.

While not engaging in negotiations with the conglomerates, they have made over 120 secret deals behind the backs of workers, further dividing and isolating those out on strike. It should be noted that many, if not most of these 120 IIMA are with games that are being developed by companies in the employers’ group.

Objectively speaking, SAG-AFTRA is operating as the facilitator or “enabler” of the introduction of AI into the video game industry, which will result in the mass destruction of jobs.

Workers must draw a balance sheet and realize that in their struggle for a decent standard of living they face enemies on two sides—the employers, who ruthlessly want to squeeze every ounce of labor out of workers without giving up a dime, and the union bureaucrats, who conspire behind the backs of workers to sabotage every struggle.

The only way out of the impasse is for performers to take the reins of the struggle into their own hands through the creation of democratically controlled rank-and-file committees independent of the union bureaucrats, as well the capitalist political parties they defend. But video game performers alone will not be able to progress in isolation. They will need to expand their struggle by uniting with other workers in the entertainment industry, as well as healthcare workers, logistics workers, educators, autoworkers and others who face the same conditions, and, in fact, many of the same bosses as themselves. This is the only way forward.



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