

# Guerrilla tactics, solidarity fuel Writers Guild strike

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Writers Guild 'Trans Takeover' picket of Netflix in Los Angeles, May 18. Photo: Writers Guild of America West

May 25 – The Writers Guild of America (WGA) strike is in its 24th day, holding strong and gaining support from other unionized workers and allies, not only in the entertainment industry but even among others who have much in common with their members.

The billionaires that own the studios and streaming companies haven't budged in negotiations, but the strike is energetic and determined. The picket lines are dense and loud, and film locations are dropping like flies because of the strikers' guerrilla-style tactics. Shows are getting canceled one after another.

The growth of streaming has had a huge impact on writers' compensation and is one of the most important issues for strikers. Netflix, Apple, Amazon Prime, Hulu, Max and other big entertainment companies have shifted the way that entertainment is delivered. This strike is popularly called the "Netflix strike."

Companies have used the growth of streaming – amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic – to cheat writers out of millions of dollars in pay. A shorter number of series episodes has become the new normal – miniseries.

The writing for miniseries content has been relegated to what are called "mini-rooms," where a smaller number of writers work on a series that will go direct to streaming, bypassing the normal process of writing a pilot. Those writers are paid only scale instead of the higher pay for longer, traditional television series. If the miniseries isn't picked up for a second season, they get no residuals.



Writers Guild 'Trans Takeover' picket of Netflix in Los Angeles, May 18. Photo: Yuki

## **Shut down production**

The guerrilla-tactic picket lines of WGA strikers as they've disrupted film shoots on location are exciting and impressive. Production locations are normally kept quiet, but strikers are getting tipped off and have shut down production.

They've hit studio filming too. Early in the strike, Apple's series "Loot" was put on hold indefinitely. By week two of the strike, "Power Book II: Ghost," "Pretty Little Liars: Summer School," "Billions," and "Daredevil: Born Again" all lost days of filming.

In mid-May, WGA picketers showed up before the film crew at Harlem and Bronx,

New York, shooting locations for “The Penguin” and stopped filming. “FBI: Most Wanted” filming was shut down. When picket lines hit studios, Teamster trucks delivering equipment do a U-turn and head back to the warehouse.

Militant actions aren’t limited to disrupting film shoots. [Variety reported](#) that 200 trans writers and allies held a “Trans Takeover” picket on May 18 at the Netflix building in Los Angeles. Writer Jacob Tobia, a writer for the Showtime pilot “Sissy,” said, “Strikes are moments where you redefine who is at the table, and we want to be sure that we’re sending a really strong message to the world that we’re at the table now and we want to stay at the table.”

There has also been great solidarity by the Directors Guild of America, the IATSE stagehands’ union, and the California Gig Workers Union, organizers of Californians who work gig jobs like Uber, Lyft, DoorDash, Instacart, and others.

A number of famed actors have joined the picket lines. Actor Drew Carey has pledged to pay for picketers’ meals until the end of the strike. Sean Penn and Mandy Patinkin both made the news with strong statements of support.

Looming on the horizon is the possibility of a Screen Actors Guild - American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) strike. Contract negotiations for 160,000 actors are set to begin ahead of the June 30 contract expiration. A strike authorization vote is already being planned.

A companion strike by actors could shut down everything for the industry.

## **CEO booed off stage**

When Warner Bros. CEO David Zaslav showed up at Boston University to deliver the commencement speech, he was booed off the stage by students in solidarity with the strike.

College campuses have seen a lot of strikes in recent months. Student researchers, teachers' assistants, cafeteria workers, and shuttle bus drivers have all won good contracts or union recognition.

The U.S. media and entertainment industry is worth \$717 billion, larger than the Gross Domestic Product of 162 countries. These profiteers could easily afford to pay what the writers are demanding.

The WGA's website displays a list with information about the eight biggest companies where the union represents workers. The total revenue of these eight alone is more than \$1.3 trillion! The total cost of meeting the workers' demands would be less than one-tenth of a percent of their revenue, at \$343 million.

But it isn't only the super-rich studios that have been gorging on profits. Real-estate capitalists make a fortune from entertainment. [According to Bisnow.com](#), "Blackstone, TPG Real Estate Partners, Bain Capital Partners and Square Mile Capital Management have spent billions combined buying and developing new studio space across the U.S." These are some of the biggest real estate investors in the world.

To be sure, the WGA strike is up against powerful interests. Like every strike, it is essentially a war of workers with the mega-corporations and banks that make up the U.S. capitalist ruling class – a war with Wall Street.

[WGA's website](#) has a list of locations and times for picket lines that even includes a list of parking spots. New Yorkers and Angelinos should visit the lines at every opportunity. Film and TV writers are fighting for all of us!

