

## AFD Ep 469 Links and Notes - Hollywood Strikes [Bill/Rachel] - Recording May 7, 2023

[Bill] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Hollywood\\_strikes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Hollywood_strikes)

Including the current 2023 Writers Guild of America strike, there have been [AT LEAST] 17 significant labor strikes against Hollywood by the craft or industrial unions representing film and TV industry workers. The first was in 1936. There were [AT LEAST] three in the 1940s, one in the 1950s, two in the 1960s, one in the 1970s, six in the 1980s, none in the 90s, two in the first decade of the 2000s, and now the current one at time of recording. Some were very broad strikes, while others have been quite restricted to specific occupations such as animators, musicians, set decorators, even directors, and obviously also actors and writers. (In fact, more than half a dozen strikes have been by the writers.) You might also recall hearing about narrowly averted strikes like the 2021 dispute that nearly led to a strike by the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts (or IATSE). Today we're going to talk about the current strike and the demands of the WGA, and also highlight some of the biggest strikes in Hollywood history, including a strike where Ronald Reagan worked on the side of organized labor.

[Rachel] <https://twitter.com/adamconover/status/1653272585252257793>

<https://variety.com/2023/tv/news/writers-guild-contract-negotiation-mini-room-1235568173/>

Adam Conover tweeted an excellent thread breaking down the demands of WGA. In the era of Subscription View On Demand (SVOD) television and movies, WGA members are striking to ensure that writers' rooms are paid as well as their traditional media counterparts. Among their demands: an established minimum number of television writers, as opposed to the "mini room", where a showrunner hires a small handful of writers to work on scripts before a show is greenlit. A mini room may also be spun up between seasons before a new season is confirmed. In the Netflix model, in which a next season is always up in the air, this is a way to cut costs on writers' rooms if a project doesn't come into fruition. If or when the project or next season is greenlit, oftentimes the mini room writers do not continue on the project. *The issues with both scenarios, however, are significantly more pronounced for newer writers. Not only are newer writers less likely to get staffed in a mini room, but even if they do, they will only make scale. In the WGA's view, this has led to an overall depression of writer pay rates as mini rooms become more common. In addition, writers will struggle to advance to showrunner if they don't get the chance to be involved in the production and post-production process.* The WGA is demanding a minimum of 6 writers pre-greenlight (with 4 writer-producers, who are better paid), and a sliding scale of writers based on episode count, up to 12 writers, with about half working as writer-producers, post-greenlight. They are also demanding minimum terms of employment: at least 10 weeks consecutive employment for pre-greenlight projects, and 3 weeks per episode post-greenlight, up to 52 weeks. The Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) rejected the offers, and refused to counter-offer. For features, WGA members are asking for SVOD films to be treated similarly to theatrical features once the budget exceeds \$12 million, including residuals at the features rate. The AMPTP only wants to offer theatrical terms to high-budget SVOD programs with a runtime greater than or equal to 96 minutes, with a budget of \$40 million+, with no increase in residuals. In addition, WGA wants to extend pension and health benefits to all writers on a writing team, which the AMPTP rejected. And most importantly of all, the WGA seeks to greatly regulate the use of AI to write or punch-up scripts, and to limit what material can be used to train AI programs. The AMPTP counter? "Offering annual meetings to discuss advancements in technology". So far, public response seems to be positive towards the writers, but if delays to productions become more significant, the tide of public opinion may turn against them.

[Bill]

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Effect\\_of\\_the\\_2007%E2%80%9308\\_Writers\\_Guild\\_of\\_America\\_strike\\_on\\_television](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Effect_of_the_2007%E2%80%9308_Writers_Guild_of_America_strike_on_television)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2007%E2%80%9308\\_Writers\\_Guild\\_of\\_America\\_strike](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2007%E2%80%9308_Writers_Guild_of_America_strike)

Although the 2007-08 WGA strike of 3 months and 8 days has been blamed for the explosion of the unscripted Reality TV genre – which has some truth to it even if it's a complicated story – one huge win for the writers was gaining jurisdiction over the other big emerging type of television: big budget original web streaming shows. This was just about to become an enormous part of the Hollywood portfolio and if the WGA had failed to assert union hiring requirements there, it would probably have destroyed the union. Both sides understood that streaming was the real battleground of that strike. At the time, however, much of the coverage of the strike was about residuals for DVD sales, which were actually about to decline anyway. And in fact the union did not win any changes on DVD residuals in that strike. It's unsurprising that streaming residuals instead is an ongoing controversy 15 years later, including as an angle of the 2023 strike, but if the 2008 strike outcome had gone a different way, there might not have even been union writers at all on the zillions of shows soon to be produced on streaming platforms. But the views of the various unions in Hollywood, not only for writers and actors but also many other types of union employees in the industry, is that residuals help smooth out income for the workers between projects where they're getting paid on contract.

[Rachel] The Disney animators' strike of 1941 lasted for 3 months and 26 days. The Screen Cartoonists Guild was seeking to win recognition and a contract for animation workers at Disney, which was a very anti-union workplace with a noticeably unfair, uneven, and chaotic compensation system. Walt Disney gave a rambling in-person tirade to some 1,200 employees and fired a number of the union organizers, among them top animator Art Babbitt, prompting a wildcat strike ahead of schedule, which spiraled from there and received a great deal of support, including material non-cooperation with Disney from other unions, both in the industry and in external industries. The strike became extremely contentious, with the strikers beheading Walt in effigy, and Disney circulating photos of the picketers among the still-working animators, implying that he was keeping tabs on who was picketing and who was working. Walt Disney was eventually forced to accept defeat under significant pressure from the US State Department and the National Labor Relations Board because Disney was fulfilling a US soft power contract for the federal government to propagandize in Latin America as World War II escalated towards an inevitable US entry. Latin American trade-unionists and communists, coordinated via the heavily internationalized and left-wing National Maritime Union of the Congress of Industrial Unions on behalf of the animators, were going to organize sympathy protests across the region against Disney screenings if the strike was not resolved. As a result of the strike, the animators received pay equity, transparency in pay and employee classifications, a 40-hour workweek, pension and health benefits, and the establishment of a grievance procedure, as well as screen credits for all animators. Also included was the reinstatement of all fired animators. However, despite the victory of the strikers, ill will was so high that nearly half the studio's employees refused to return to work for the company, and eventually Walt Disney would retaliate against many of them by testifying to the House Un-American Activities Committee that they were communists and getting them on the Hollywood Blacklist... Another outcome of the strike was the formation of the Conference of Studio Unions, which sought to unite workers of various crafts, and was a party in the next major Hollywood strike.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disney\\_animators%27\\_strike](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disney_animators%27_strike)

<https://jacobin.com/2021/05/disney-workers-animators-cartoonists-artists-strike-picket-1941-guild-scg-sorrell-babbitt>

<https://www.cartoonbrew.com/artist-rights/day-75-years-ago-disney-animation-changed-forever-140103.html> (Excellent photo gallery featuring the beautifully illustrated picket signs and the Walt Disney effigy in a guillotine)

[Bill] The 1945 set decorators' strike by the Conference of Studio Unions ended in disaster, termed Hollywood Black Friday or Hollywood Bloody Friday, when a prolonged riot broke out on October 5th in front of the Warner Bros lot in Burbank as strikebreakers attempted to cross the picket lines. Warner's private security and private firefighters began tear-gassing and hosing down the rioting strikers, while the Burbank police kept requesting more and more support from the Glendale and LA PDs. Additionally, much of the strike conflict had occurred between the Conference of Studio Unions and the rival IATSE, which was in a jurisdictional turf war. Although many IATSE members supported the 10,000+ striking CSU members, the official policy from union leadership was not to cooperate with the CSU strikers. Nominally, the CSU won the strike on paper, but this ended up being more of a stall tactic by the studios to work out a side agreement with IATSE to lock out and replace every single CSU member the following year, backed tacitly by a vote of the Screen Actors Guild, with further violent clashes ensuing. The CSU essentially collapsed and the set decorator workers, who were mostly trade workers with very transferable skills like carpentry, left Hollywood to take normal trade jobs in other industries. The 1945 riot and the later clashes are blamed as one factor that helped get the Taft-Hartley Act passed in 1947 after the Republicans took Congress in the midterms. And of course union leaders of the failed labor actions were soon put on the Hollywood Blacklist as alleged communists.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hollywood\\_Black\\_Friday](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hollywood_Black_Friday)

[Rachel] 1960 - Reagan SAG strike

We've mentioned residuals several times in this episode, and astonishingly, Ronald Reagan was instrumental in establishing residuals for actors on both big and small screens. With the rise of television and televised movies, film actors started to organize to demand residual payments for their roles. During Ronald Reagan's first tenure as SAG president, 1947-1952, he helped to secure residuals for television actors when their episodes were re-run. Film actors put their faith in Reagan and elected him president of SAG once again in 1959. The producers at the studios dug their heels in, because they saw that if they acquiesced to the actors' demands, they'd eventually have to extend residuals to screenwriters and directors (spoiler alert: that's exactly what happened). On March 7, 1960, SAG members voted to authorize a strike, and almost 14,000 actors walked off the job, kicking off the first industry-wide strike in Hollywood's history. Although actors wanted to receive residuals for future roles *and* retroactive payments for films shown on TV from 1948-1959, here's what they got after 6 weeks of negotiations:

1. Actor residuals for all studio films made starting in 1960.
2. No residuals for any studio films produced before 1948.
3. In lieu of residuals for films made between 1948 and 1959, the producers agreed to a one-time payout of \$2.25 million, a contribution SAG would use as seed money for a new union health insurance plan and a pension plan.

Some actors criticized the lack of retroactive residuals, among them Bob Hope and Mickey Rooney, but Reagan was pleased with the outcome saying, "I think the benefits down through the years to performers will be greater than all the previous contracts we have negotiated, put together." His prediction was correct; since SAG first issued residual checks, up to 2011, when the article was written, more than \$7.4 billion has been disbursed to actors, and the health and pension plans seeded by the one-time payout from the producers has been of incredible benefit to actors.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/11/what-reagan-did-for-hollywood/248391/>

[Bill] 1988 - WGA strike (mostly reactive to cuts demanded by management in the contract renegotiations that resulted in no deal being reached) ... Due to the months-long strike over the spring and summer, and while waiting for new shows to be ready to air after the strike ended in August, the big three networks apparently began airing a lot more, longer-form political advertising to fill airtime. I was unable to find any additional information on this or examples of long-form ads, which I assume were probably independent expenditures. The most devastating and infamous anti-Dukakis ads ran in September and October 1988, after the strike, but they were standard length spots. Fittingly for a year with such horrendous and salacious tough-on-crime political rhetoric, the 1988 WGA strike also resulted in the creation of the fly-on-the-wall reality TV show COPS, which has now run for 35 seasons. Rupert Murdoch's Fox Broadcasting Company, which picked up the show in 1988, had recently been launched as the 4th network and they didn't have any union writers anyway and were even more in need of something to put on the air.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1988\\_Writers\\_Guild\\_of\\_America\\_strike](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1988_Writers_Guild_of_America_strike)

[Bill] The 2000 commercial actors strike was nominally won by the actors (SAG & AFTRA) under pressure on the TV advertising agencies by their major clients, such as Procter & Gamble. However, concessions to the union on base rates were mostly applicable to over-the-air network TV commercials, and to a lesser extent cable, and the unions won nothing at all for residuals on the increasingly important advertising markets of cable and internet video. To this day these are often non-union jobs and there are no residuals, even if the ad is shown thousands or millions of times. Network TV commercials and their residuals remain a massive source of income for union actors, even now, in terms of the collective dollar amount for the entire sector.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2000\\_Commercial\\_Actors\\_Strike](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2000_Commercial_Actors_Strike)

[Rachel] Discussion points: Wages vs. class position - Although there are some well-compensated writers, they are still in a position where they sell their creative labor for wages. Watch out for cynical messaging from the producers talking about greedy writers.

Union saturation in show business is why labor is so strong in NY/LA. Almost every craft is unionized, and workers are well-educated on the good that unions do, and show solidarity with each other.

Costs vs control/power