

A Sermon on the 2023 Hollywood Writers/Artists' Strike
Sermon by Rev. Minister Angela Smith of COPE for September 3rd, 2023 (and beyond)

Many of my friends and family members are also members of various labor unions including Teamsters, AFL-CIO, IAM (International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers), and SAG-AFTRA. With the UPS strike brewing in July of 2023, we know the name of the specific company, the nature of the contract disputes, and the union to which they belong which is Teamsters. The Hollywood Strike backed by SAG-AFTRA appears to be different in many ways. For one, I don't know which studios are involved and sources range from all studios to just the major studios but there is debate about how many are considered major studios from various sources. SAG-AFTRA claims all 160,000-175,000 members of their union are on strike.

I searched for the name of a specific studio with specific contract terms at issue and found 1937 Fleischer Studios strike: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1937_Fleischer_Studios_strike due to low pay and poor working conditions. This was the name of the union: Commercial Artists and Designers Union Local 20329. I'm unfamiliar with any union without a local hub that handles a specific contract dispute with a specific company where the workers are members of that specific union. All the articles I'm seeing on the current "Hollywood Strike" all just say all Hollywood studios or the major Hollywood Studios or all studios and all contracts that any union member may be subjected to in the industry if hired or under a current contract to which they agreed at time of hiring. The union is claiming all 160,000-175,000 artists and writers they represent are being treated unfairly by all the studios. MGM has 4,200 contracted employees at any given time. Paramount has 24,500. 6,032 at NBCUniversal/Universal. 9,500 at Sony (which is also ABC I believe). Do all studios abide by a single boilerplate contract regardless of size or income or project value that is dictated by the employees and that's why a general strike because that's how Hollywood does contract negotiations? MGM has the least to lose and I can see why they are backing the strike. I bet none of their employees have gone on strike as a result. Smart. But, if so, then MGM's contracts are different than everyone else's and therefore it would seem not all studios are using a boilerplate contract designed by SAG-AFTRA that can be amended through a general strike that results in artists and writers being satisfied with the contracts going forward. Tom Hanks reportedly renegotiated his contracts with Sony and on Forrest Gump: <https://www.cheatsheet.com/entertainment/tom-hanks-earned-about-40-million-for-forrest-gump-because-he-negotiated-his-contract-a-specific-way.html/> Are people still negotiating for themselves then? The strike makes no sense to those who are particularly familiar with the labor movement and how labor unions operate.

What I'd expect to see is a headline like "SAG-AFTRA unionized Sony writers and artists voted to strike at time of contract negotiations due to unfair business practices that include failure to include royalty/residual clauses for streaming content per view" and potential support for that specific strike against that specific studio as an example. I do not intend to disparage MGM, Sony, SAG-AFTRA, nor any labor union nor company in this sermon. I'd expect such an article as referenced in the example above to include that

the SAG-AFTRA union intends to call for a general strike in support of their Sony contracted members in such a case.

To me the entire strike seems disorganized and too big to succeed given all the studios would have to agree to let SAG-AFTRA dictate their contractual terms impacting potentially hundreds of studios. Is SAG-AFTRA just a club calling itself a union? Membership costs or costs to join SAG-AFTRA are on a sliding scale: "Annual Base dues are \$231.96. In addition, work dues are calculated at 1.575 percent of covered earnings up to \$1,000,000." Source: <https://www.sagaftra.org/membership-benefits/membership-costs> There's an initiation fee of \$3,000 on top of dues. I searched the entire site and found no information about Strike Pay for striking writers and artists. That's just unheard of with labor unions. The dues go in part to provide emergency Strike Pay during a strike. It really seems like SAG-AFTRA is a membership organization masquerading as a labor union and defrauding over 100,000 artists and writers who are ignorant regarding how unions work and why they collect dues in the first place.

Actors reportedly earn an average of \$40-\$86K per year. If they have an agent, the agent generally takes 10% of that as the industry standard. So, \$4,000-\$8,600 per year on average is what they get per client. Agents typically help with negotiating the contracts, including wages and working conditions. But, SAG-AFTRA charges a minimum of \$3,231.96 for the first year without helping anyone get work and apparently up to \$15,750 if earning \$1,000,000 or more without offering the benefits of agency nor Strike Pay.

I think some of my loved ones who are members of SAG-AFTRA are victims of fraud and I think the studios likely prefer to do business with the talent agencies and well-informed artists and writers do too. But, if you are one such loved one of mine, I hope I just saved you between \$231.96-\$15,750/year and believe if this is news to you that you may have grounds to sue for a refund.

I hope you don't mind my saying so. Teamsters rule!

For those interested in starting #TaoFu Self-Defense Exercises, please see <https://www.cope.church/taofu.htm> and begin at any time.

There are opportunities to send messages, receive mystery bonus blessings, and more with or without donating available now on our "Pass the Basket" page at <https://www.cope.church/basket.htm> . Thank You.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32 KJV Willful blindness is an abomination.

COPE accepts Feedback, critical and complimentary. Learn more at <https://www.cope.church/feedback.htm> . For the sake of keeping myself and others humble, a sense of humor is welcome on all sides.