

Hollywood conflict ultimately a valid question

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The question of the respective interests of the two sides in the Hollywood conflict is ultimately a valid question in light of the article. However, perhaps before embarking on an exploration of what their respective interests might be, it would be wise to first clearly define what we are referring to when we reference the two sides of the debate. The clearest separation between the two sides shown in the article is that of the guilds versus the producers or movie houses.

However, perhaps equally interesting is the gray area, which falls in between the two - for example, those members of a guild who are also producers. The point in this respect is to determine where those people lie on the scale of either being more biased toward the guild members (actors and writers) or toward the producers. If we take our two sides as defined, the producers versus the guild members then we are in a sufficient position to examine the respective interests of each side.

It is immediately clear that this is a long-standing debate as we begin to examine the article, " On the morning of October 8, 1945, thousands of picketing film workers, some wearing white-painted civil defense helmets, were confronted by truckloads of scabs who attacked with lead pipes, monkey wrenches and nightsticks" (Cooper, 2001, ¶ 1). From this inauspicious opening, we can already start to summon some idea of what the central debate might be.

The principal concern of both sides of this debate is money- whether that money should be residual compensation for work performed on a completed product (for the actors and writers), or ongoing revenue from the marketing

and sale of that product (for the producers). While the article details the previous compensation rates for guild members, “ When a consumer plops down \$25 for a new DVD, for example, the credited screenwriter receives only 4 cents” (Cooper, 2001, ¶ 10) it also clearly indicates the desire of the guild members - for additional compensation in this regard. Therefore, we can clearly define the interest of the guild members as being that of what they might regard as adequate compensation for their work.

However, this is not the only interest at work in the guild members, as we look deeper into the article and examine the strikes that have taken place previously. “ After last year's costly six-month SAG-AFTRA walkout in the commercials sector, during which thousands of actors went without paychecks, there's little rank-and-file enthusiasm for another season without work” (Cooper, 2001, ¶ 33).

Clearly, given the fact that the previous strike had damaged lives and caused hardship to guild members, the guild members themselves would indicate among their interests the fastest possible resolution to any conflict between the guild and the producers. As mentioned in the article by one IATSE official, “ You don't go on strike for six months to get what you could have gotten in the first week” (Cooper, 2001, ¶ 15). Perhaps then, we have more than simply two sides at work in the conflict: the guilds, the guild members, and the producers.

The producers, by contrast, clearly are eager to maintain the status quo. In one negotiation, specific figures are named, with the WGA scaling back its

demands to a meager 25% increase, and being met with “ an offer of a zero percent increase” (Cooper, 2001, ¶ 13).

It is worthwhile at this point to note that both sides have expressed interests and not positions. To clarify, the interest on the guild member’s side might be increased compensation, while a possible position for that interest would be the actual renegotiation of contractual agreements between the guilds and the producers. Similarly, on the producer’s side, the interest is maintaining the status quo, while the position would be the maintenance of existing contracts.

To examine points, we should again discuss how those points affect both sides of the debate. The points are clear enough that they can be listed one by one. Due to the mild bias of the article toward the guilds, and guild members there are considerably more points presented from this side of the argument than the other.

The first and simplest point is the sheer mass of guild members demanding better working conditions: “ pent-up demand has reached a boiling point” (Cooper, 2001, ¶ 5) mentions WGA vice president, Dan Petrie, Jr. Whether this demand and pressure is due to poor contracts with producers, or poor negotiations of the same is subject to debate, but is beyond the scope of this essay.

Second, there are the many sides of the financial coin. Artists are concerned primarily with fair pay for the use of their work in both the original and recreated mediums. As mentioned in the articles, “ artists are paid little or

nothing in residuals for such reuse and resale of their work” (Cooper, 2001, ¶ 9). This perhaps was less of a problem before the emergence of the Internet, and the growth of the International market. In fact, it is clearly stated that writers had previously accepted lower pay, however they “ did so with the understanding that talent would eventually receive a fair share as those markets matured” (Cooper, 2001, ¶ 10). According to the article, this is something, which has now happened.

An additional aspect to the financial issues is the matter of what the article refers to as “ transfer pricing” abuse - the maneuvering of intellectual property among subsidiary partners of a corporate owner at less than fair market value to reduce the required amount of residuals, which are eligible to be paid. Just as these points are the primary ones discussed in the article, there are none mentioned for the producers - other than their interest in maintaining the status quo, as discussed earlier in the essay.

The primary conflict of money for the two sides is, according to the article, a major threat to the movie industry as a whole. As this conflict approaches resolution, the successful negotiation by the unions to a deal which will allow for substantial enough earnings to appease their member base while still allowing for enough profit for the producers, will prove to determine if the actor and writer guilds can escape their status “ as pampered poodles.” (Cooper, 2001)

References

Cooper, M. (2001). Residual Anger. Retrieved February 11, 2007 from, <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20010402/cooper>

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