

At the risk of being yet another actor giving his opinion about the ongoing fight between SAG and AFTRA, I'm hoping that there might be a way out of this. Rather than pitting artist against artist, maybe we could find a way to get what both unions are looking for.

Both are, of course, right. AFTRA feels that a work stoppage would be devastating to its members and SAG believes that if they don't draw a line in the sand, the studios will repeat what they did with DVDs.

There are a couple of fundamental facts that both sides have to start with... first is that the WGA, DGA and IATSE all agreed to a certain model (DVDs not being a part of it). Breaking that model for AFTRA or SAG would retroactively break the other models... so you can be pretty sure that the AMPTP isn't going to do that. The second thing is understanding the way these unions work. They're unique in structure to other unions. Doug Allen (the SAG National Executive Director) has said on several occasions that this would be a negotiation for "the linemen, not for the quarterbacks" (Doug did a lot of the negotiating for the NFL.) The spirit of the statement isn't wrong... it's just the structure. Unlike the NFL, in this Guild, the quarterbacks protect the linemen. I've been very lucky in my career, which has put me in the place that I don't need a union to check on my residuals, or my pension, or protect my 12 hour turnaround. I used to need that, and may again... but right now I don't. That means it's my responsibility to look out for actors who are trying to stay afloat from year to year. Anything less is irresponsible of me.

Work stoppage will do a great deal of harm to those actors... agencies will close... TV pilots won't get made... more reality shows... we all know the scenario. But that doesn't mean just roll over and give the producers what they want... it means diligence.

The producers say that there's no money in New Media right now. There's some truth in that... for this moment. It was also true for cable, VHS and DVD... all of which became very profitable for the studios... and the actors were out in the cold. With New Media, we have our foot in the door, but who's to say a year from now, if it becomes profitable, that the same thing won't happen again... actors out in the cold. So here are a couple of ways that the quarterbacks can protect the linemen:

First, we set up a panel... Jack Nicholson and Tom Hanks, for instance... ten of them that sit down with the studio heads once a year... ten people that the studio heads don't often say "no" to. Those ten people walk in the door with all the new data that SAG and AFTRA compile, and adjust the pay for actors... once a year.

Second, we go to the actors who make an exorbitant amount of money, and raise their dues. Right now, there's a cap of six thousand bucks that actors pay their union... based on a million dollars in earnings. Make it \$6,000 for every million... if someone makes \$20 million, they pay \$120,000 into the union. That could go a long way in helping pensions and health care. The quarterbacks have to do more.

To be sure, I'm not the brightest bulb out there. So maybe someone has a lot better idea... I just happen to believe so strongly in both unions... my father, my mother, aunt, uncle, even cousins were all members of either SAG or AFTRA long before me.

What we can't do is pit artist against artist... because the one thing you can be sure of is that stories about Jack Nicholson vs. Tom Hanks only strengthens the negotiating power of the AMPTP.

George Clooney