

US writers' strike a step closer

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US networks could be left without some of their key shows in the coming months after more than 96% of the Writers Guild of America (WGA)'s members voted to allow strike action.

The vote hands union leaders the authority to call a strike if a deal is not struck with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) this week.

The dispute between the WGA and AMPTP, which represents the entertainment industry, centres around better provision for mid-level writers and improving pensions and healthcare.

More than 6,000 writers cast ballots in the vote, with 96.3% approving strike action if a deal cannot be reached.

The WGA, which [wrote](#) to ad buyers and investors earlier this year to gain their support in the dispute, thanked its members for their “resolve and your faith in us as your representatives,” adding: “We are determined to achieve a fair contract. Talks will resume tomorrow.”

A strike could start from midnight on May 1 if the talks, which are resuming after a

hiatus during the vote, fail to provide a result.

The AMPTP said its companies were “committed to reaching a deal at the bargaining table that keeps the industry working.”

It added: “The 2007 writers strike hurt everyone. Writers lost more than US\$287m in compensation that was never recovered, deals were cancelled and many writers took out strike loans to make ends meet. We remain focused on our objective of reaching a deal with the WGA at the bargaining table when the Guild returns on April 25.”

The WGA has previously said its proposals would cost US\$178m per year across the industry, with Disney (US\$21m), Fox (US\$25m) and NBC (US\$18m) bearing the greatest burden.

The union said script fees in basic cable and new media trailed those in broadcast, adding that the average salary of a TV writer-producer had fallen by 23% over the past two years

Talks between the WGA and the AMPTP took place last month but ended on March 23 after no agreement was reached, prompting this latest vote.

Shows such as The Big Bang Theory, The Tonight Show and Saturday Night Live are among those that could be affected.

The last writers' strike started in November 2007 and lasted for almost four months, affecting a huge swathe of US programming. Before that, a 22-week walk-out by writers in 1988 cost the entertainment industry an estimated US\$500m.

The WGA was involved in a long-running labour dispute with ITV's unscripted arm last year, with the two sides eventually reaching a settlement.
