

A NEW UNION FOR A NEW WORLD

An Open Letter to AFTRA Members

There's been a lot of talk lately about the possibility of a "merger" between AFTRA and SAG. We take this as an encouraging sign: a reflection of the improving relations between our unions. AFTRA leadership and members have always been, and continue to be, committed to creating one media and entertainment union for all actors, performers and broadcast journalists. We stand ready to work hard to make that happen in the near future. But make no mistake, we will not repeat the past. We believe that any effort to create a new and stronger national union must not only be successful, but also lead to a more powerful, better functioning union than any existing models today.

It's important to remember that creating any kind of "merged" union is not a goal, it is a means to a goal.

OUR PRIORITIES

Like members of any union in any industry, AFTRA members want more jobs and better jobs. This means the union's core missions must be **organizing more union work** and **raising the wages and working conditions in our contracts**.

No union can be successful at one without being successful at the other. Consider the reality in which we work: few of our major employers are in only one business or produce only one form of content; few of our members forge an entire career doing only one kind of work in only one medium; and our work increasingly takes us beyond the geographic boundaries of Hollywood and New York City.

Our union's first priority is to negotiate strong contracts for all its members throughout the nation. Second, in order to effectively enhance its power at the bargaining table, our union must reflect the current realities of the industries in which

we work, as well as the nature of the work we do. This means research, preparation and, most important, organizing.

Ultimately, we want to build an encompassing union that keeps us all working under strong contracts, and also empowers its entire membership.

A MATTER OF POWER

Some see "merger" mainly as a way to solve the very real problems posed by paying dues to multiple unions, contributing to multiple health and retirement plans and wasting resources on redundant administrative processes. As longtime working members of multiple unions, we also yearn for the streamlined efficiencies that would make each of our individual professional lives easier to manage and less costly. But as welcome as these benefits may be, they are not the reason to create a new organization. We should do it for one reason and one reason only: **to build power**.

While we should always be sensitive to the realities of production budgets and the economics of the various intertwined sectors of the media industry, we must also ensure we are in a position to prevent employers from degrading our hard-won wages and working conditions by shifting production away from organized markets or shifting modes of production away from union workers.

If a union only represents one small piece of a large conglomerate's operations and revenue centers—be it only scripted programming or only recorded music or only local broadcasting—workers will have much less leverage at the negotiating table. Unless we cover as wide a swath of the media landscape as our employers do, they will always have the upper hand.

A NEW VISION FOR A NEW UNION

Above all, the new union must reflect the nature of our world today. It is time to stop using the catchphrase "merger," which carries baggage and assumptions from past efforts and failures that are no longer relevant. This isn't 1960, 1998 or



Bob Edwards, National First Vice President

2003. Ours is a world of ringtones and iPads. It's a world in which alternative news and lifestyle programming is cropping up on D2 subsignals and the Internet, while traditional

networks shutter their news bureaus across the country. It's a world in which, come September, there will only be one soap opera left in New York City that provides sustained acting work. It's a world in which "onscreen" no longer means just television or movie theaters but virtually anything, anywhere with a flat surface. We live in a world where the old approaches to "merger" no longer make sense, and it's time to speak of building a new union for the future.

We assure you, what's happening today at ABC News isn't going to stop there. The significant challenges facing our broadcast journalist members are going to march right down the corporate hallway to confront actors working in entertainment. Whether it be salary reductions and added work responsibilities facing broadcasters, declining quotes and reduced work opportunities for actors or record labels' imposition of "360 deals" on recording artists, anyone who thinks that we don't all share the same basic core concerns and interests doesn't understand what 21st century media is all about. AFTRA members learned this lesson more than 10 years ago when our recording artist members faced the "new" model of digital distribution of music: the Napster and iTunes phenomena. In short order, the issues we began confronting in sound recordings in the late 1990s migrated to scripted entertainment programming in film and television. This is the way our world works, and a union that ignores these realities is in peril.

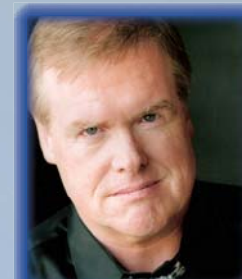
What does this mean for us as union members? Among other things, it

means that we must engage in a national strategy under which all Locals, Branches, Chapters, Divisions and members function in concert to maintain jurisdiction over our work no matter how it moves or grows, no matter what form it takes. It also means building a structure where no single city or no single category of member—actor, recording artist or broadcaster—is able to unilaterally impose its will on everyone else. Any new union must incorporate the best of each contributing organization and avoid adopting our respective dysfunctions.

WHAT WE MUST DO FIRST

For nearly two decades now, many of us have worked hard to see our unions combine to create a new national union; it's why many of us became union activists in the first place. But one thing we've learned over the years is that this effort requires careful thought. Why did our efforts to "merge" fail in the past? It wasn't because AFTRA leadership and rank-and-file members didn't support the concept—in fact, we overwhelmingly voted for it twice. "Merger" failed because both unions put it to a vote without first addressing a number of critical questions about our mission and strategy and because we allowed secondary micro-issues to distract us from the primary macro-goal of building union members' long-term collective power.

We will not let history repeat itself. We cannot commit hundreds of thousands of your dues dollars along with the limited time and resources of the AFTRA staff—to say nothing of the countless hours contributed by your all-volunteer leadership team—unless the unions' leaders share a clear mutual understanding of precisely what we are trying to achieve. Do we share a view of the core mission and goals of a new union? How must it be structured in order to succeed? We must get it



Matt Kimbrough, National Treasurer

THE WORK BEFORE US

We all have much to learn about and contribute to the new landscape. We have a series of major contract negotiations coming up this year and next. In 2010, we will be negotiating new agreements for Network Staff Newspersons, Sound Recordings, Network Code and Exhibit A. In 2011, we have Non-Broadcast/ Industrials and the Interactive Media Agreement. These are important contract negotiations likely to have a major long-term impact on our professional lives. The wages and working conditions meetings that precede these talks will provide members with a real opportunity to educate each other and help shape the world we will all be working in. This is a tremendous opportunity, and we encourage everyone to participate in it.

It's now a little more than a year since AFTRA and SAG jointly bargained our Commercials contracts together under the AFL-CIO-facilitated "no raiding" protocol. In the last three months, we have taken steps to jointly bargain the Exhibit A (Primetime Television) contract together with SAG, also under the protocol. This is all good news, for it reflects a new spirit of respect and cooperation between our two unions. We shouldn't minimize its importance, nor should we exaggerate it. Like "merger," joint bargaining is not an end in itself; rather, it is a means to an end. This is a time for hope that our unions will continue to work together respectfully and productively, as we figure out the "nuts and bolts" of sitting together at the bargaining table, as well as the principles of partnership that must underlie our joint efforts.

Our unions should continue to work together in the joint negotiations, committee work, legislative public policy initiatives and other activities. Through shared research, we should study our industries together to identify trends,

right because our members cannot afford for us to fail. The third time must be the charm.

Workers' power, not politics, must drive our work.

employment patterns and potential areas of union growth. Together, we should work to anticipate how our industries will evolve (or, in some cases, stay the same). If we do all this, when the time is right to sit down to form our new union, we will be prepared and aligned in our priorities.

WE WILL SUCCEED

Everything we do as union members should be about building power to improve wages and working conditions. That is why AFTRA members are already engaged in an historic program of internal change; we will not stop our forward evolution while the world changes around us. AFTRA members will continue to move forward



Lainie Cooke, National Recording Secretary

with our internal organizing program through which we are working to transform our old 20th-century service model into a 21st-century organizing model and will expand members' collective power as the employers for whom we all work consolidate, shift and evolve.

Union power starts with organizing, continues with strong bargaining and, when the timing is right, it includes exploring the creation of a new national union that serves those missions. It culminates in a working world that is all union, all the time, for all media professionals all around the country—in large and small markets alike. This is our vision and this is our goal.

In solidarity,

Roberta Reardon
National President

Bob Edwards
National First Vice President

Ron Morgan
National Second Vice President

Matthew Kimbrough
National Treasurer

Lainie Cooke
National Recording Secretary