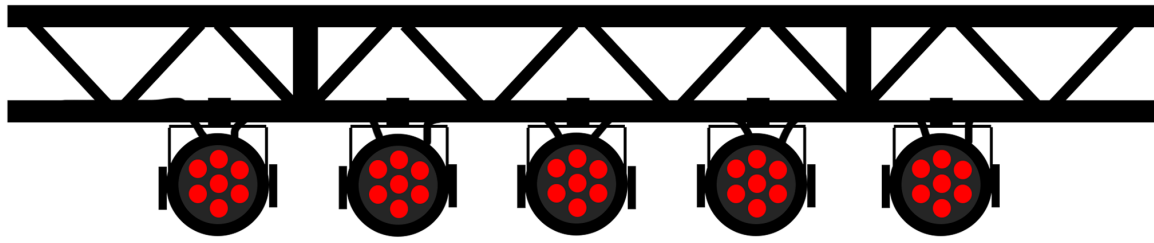


Strike The Set



News for stagehands, techs, and events workers
Written by *us*, to defend *our* interests

OFF-SEASON EDITION: THE FOUR-WAY CONFLICT OF “DAZZLING NIGHTS” **by Fiona Wrench (PGH)**

As Dazzling Nights comes to end, the off-season for the events industry begins. It's worth looking at this show in particular in-depth for all its abuses, its frustrations, and because it highlights all the basic conflicts within our industry.

Like every Flyspace-staffed event, all local crew is grossly underpaid. \$18 an hour is well below market rate for stagehands and barely enough to get them to show up, and this is intentional: if Flyspace charged their clients any more for labor, they would have to compete with other companies like MediaQuest—and IATSE Local 3, which is more like a temporary-labor broker than anything resembling a workers' organization. Eight stagehands per day was certainly not enough for a show big enough to require a three-week load-in. It was typical for stagehands during load in to be assigned to a task, work for an hour, then get called away to work on something else, leaving too few people left on the original assignment. No more proof of understaffing is necessary than to point out how, in a last-minute panic with only a couple days left before the event began and lots of work left to do, Flyspace and Memoir were obliged to contact the business agent of Local 3 to hire several last minute union stagehands from the call list to do the same work as Flyspace hands for almost twice as much pay. Furthermore, Flyspace workers on the customer-facing side of Flyspace events only make \$15! Are poverty wages and emails from Flyspace co-owner Jennifer Owen saying “hand-warmers will not be provided” during outdoor shifts in the winter in any way justified, when she has no problem with union stagehands getting paid \$300 per day to solve a problem Flyspace had a hand in creating?

It's important to remember Flyspace's abuses when the Memoir Agency who puts on Dazzling Nights gets the blame for everything wrong. And Memoir is certainly at fault. Much of their equipment was broken, cheap or malfunctioning. Instructions given to local crew for setting up installations were unclear or non-existent to the point where Memoir staff demanded an entire day's work be redone multiple times, even though local hands repeatedly asked that their work

be verified before continuing on—verification which either never came or was later contradicted by other Memoir staff. Co-owner of Memoir Cole NeSmith, when he was present, was condescending to local hands, treating them like idiots, and accused them of not following instructions that were never given. He nearly injured a Flyspace stagehand who was holding a ladder for him when he dropped a hand tool above her head, then laughed in her face. Memoir staff frequently made unrealistic or dangerous demands. Power was one of the most egregious issues. GFCIs tripped constantly during the show run any time it rained, to the point where on-site techs had to literally blow water out of female edison connections. Circuits were laid in such a way that far more cable was run than necessary. Long runs of fixtures daisy chained together made power difficult to trace when troubleshooting every inevitable problem while the show was open. During run of show, Memoir was in charge of hiring shuttles for off-site parking, and on busy days didn't hire enough drivers, meaning attendees at times waited an hour in the cold at the off-site parking lot while Flyspace event hands got the brunt of their frustration.

The list goes on. The garden management was no better. They allowed event-goers free reign past reasonable hours of operation. Chief Financial Officer Robert (“Bob”) Mermelstein even verbally assaulted Flyspace staff and an onsite manager after they tried to shut down part of the exhibit outside the concessions area—where the garden collects a portion of its revenue from the event—while only a few guests remained inside, long past their scheduled arrival time. During a particularly bad storm with heavy rain and fast winds, Mermelstein was opposed to shutting down the event early. There were many hazards: branches fell, bike racks and signs were blown over, paths were muddy, path lighting lost power, hanging lights were blown around at high speeds, etc. Only when an onsite tech got injured in these conditions and a garden worker had to take down his information did his attitude change.

It's perfectly natural to expect that under these conditions,

local crew might resort to small, spontaneous and unorganized forms of rebellion. So suddenly working alongside better-paid, hustling IATSE hands at the tail end of a long and frustrating load in feels a lot like working with scabs. Which is perfectly in-line with IATSE's history of scabbing and strike-breaking in Hollywood, mentioned in Edition #2 of *Strike the Set*. "State" unions like IATSE are the shareholders' and billionaires' "pet unions" that allow them to essentially buy off a portion of workers in key industries in return for co-operation and the free flow of commerce (no strikes). IATSE derives its legitimacy not from the workers in the industry it

organizes but from federal labor law and the support of the Democratic and Republican parties, and they are all too happy to return the favor by staffing rallies for Harris and Trump. What is needed instead is class-conscious unionism which opposes state unionism; a trade unionism that relies not on the state but on the workers' own power and is organized only by them and for the long-term interests of the working class as a whole, to lead a fight against capital which cares only for profit. That way spontaneous rebellions out of frustration can be turned into active, organized protests, slow-downs, sabotage and strikes, with specific demands behind them.

INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW LABOR ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

This is a public announcement of the formation of the New Labor Organizing Committee. This is a committee for coordinating the work of different labor organizations. The founding organizations are the following: New Day at UPS, New Day at Amazon, Organization of Class-Conscious Service Workers (aka The Service Worker, the organization's shop paper for service workers not employed by a national chain), Strike the Set (labor organization in events/entertainment), and Barista's Voice (organ of Starbucks workers).

The purpose of the NLOC is to organize joint action of trade unionists against imperialism in the interests of the working class. The American trade union movement is presently at a crossroads: trade unions in theory are more popular than they ever have been in this country, and at the same time, the existing trade unions (the state unions, mainly the AFL-CIO affiliates, the SEIU, and the IBT) are more discredited than ever. In spite of the wild popularity of trade unionism in the US, the movement has reached historic lows while the rank and file is continually sold out by the state union staff. As a product of this contradiction, two lines have emerged in the labor movement: a sell-out legalistic state unionist trend and an independent, combative and class conscious unionist trend opposed to it. Despite being the only path forward for the trade union movement in the US, class-conscious unionism is in a disorganized and disunited state nationally. Hence the need for a new trade union center. The New Labor Organizing Committee is the foundation around which this new trade union center will be built.

The NLOC fundamentally differs from the numerous caucuses and interest groups in the labor movement. Politically, the NLOC does not base its activity on extracting concessions through collaboration with the Democratic Party or the NLRB system, which can only lead to further betrayals and the further expansion of bureaucracy at the expense of the democratic rights of workers. The NLOC bases its activity on struggle against imperialism, not on deal-cutting with a supposedly "progressive" capitalism. Organizationally, this means building up trade union democracy. Democracy means the rank and file writes, passes, and enacts its own resolutions.

That is how every NLOC organization functions, unlike the state unions and reformist caucuses who filter everything through the demands of the NLRB-certified bureaucrats. It scarcely needs explaining that there can be no trade union rights without responsibilities, and it is the responsibility of every worker to develop the trade union movement in this way. The main methods in the trade union struggle are education and mutual consultation on the basis of shared class interests, and the main tool for winning demands is the strike. Every NLOC organization is obligated to contribute to the trade union movement on this basis.

On top of these practical tasks, the NLOC is responsible for the creation of a quarterly magazine titled "Labor Storm", to which the leaders of affiliated organizations must submit quarterly reports on the conditions in their industry and labor market, their recent organizing and the subjective situation among the workers (i.e. their demands, organizing campaigns, mistaken ideas, etc). This should serve to both improve the class consciousness of the rank and file, which will benefit from the information outside of the shop papers which generally only cover things immediately relevant, as well as indicate to the organizers the basis for collaboration across firms and industries. The magazine will be available online at newlaborpress.org.

Anyone who is curious about the basis for the new labor organizations and the need for a new trade union center is strongly encouraged to read "Political Economy of the American Labor Movement" and "Revisionism and Organized Labor in the US" at newlaborpress.org. (A more detailed explanation of the NLOC and its basis for unity is also hosted there.) Anyone with questions, suggestions, or who would like to join in the work of the NLOC can reach the general secretary, Frank (from New Day at UPS) directly at newlaboroc@proton.me.



Strike The Set is a newsletter written by event workers to rally our coworkers against production company owners and their clients, producers, promoters and venue owners, and their agents in IATSE. An independent press allows us to plan campaigns and gather information. Our long term goal is the creation of a revolutionary, industry-wide entertainment workers' union.