

WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE FILM BUSINESS

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The conditions of work in the film industry have been degrading progressively for the last two decades. The situation has reached absurd proportions hardly to believe concerning norms and standards according to general labor legislation.

The authorities are aware of the situation, in particular the European Union. The need to harmonize labor legislation within Europe has contributed with studies to know in detail the overall situation inside the European Members. The results are so despair and different from country to country that makes it impossible to a desired harmonization of working conditions across Europe.

The situation is not equally bad all around. For example in England the situation is described is to be quite good but negotiations to be very difficult.

In one of the EURO-MEI (Film and TV Production Workers' Conference) supported by the European Union, director Jim Wilson said about freelancers in Europe « *We are in trouble – Northern Europe is Ok – Southern Europe is not OK – Eastern and Central Europe agreements almost none existing, apart from in Hungary. This is a tremendous challenge, We must organise by unity across borders. As much producers interest as film workers interest – we need to have agreements, establishing standards for co-operation.....*»

The situation concerning overtime, social benefits or any kind of regulation doesn't exist in many countries. The situation is so bad that the Brazilian representative at the last Budapest EURO-MEI conference was surprised «... *in Brazil collective bargaining had been practiced since 40 years, insuring health care, insurance and decent working conditions for film workers.*»

Why not in Europe? In fact there are good examples as in Denmark «...*since the producer organisations are keen on negotiating - acknowledging that there are mutual interests in having well functioning strong production units. 92% of filmmakers are freelancers, and they are protected by same legislation as those permanently employed in regard to collective bargaining, pension, holiday pay, etc.*»

To try harmonization where rights differ apart from extreme to extreme is a difficult task to overcome. It is a work of generations. There is not only a need to improve legislation where doesn't exist but as well to keep legislation where exists.

To change legislation is not the only way to reach rights and respect. There is as well a need to change mentality amongst the professionals. The cinematographer Kurt Brazda AAC stated long time ago «*The phenomenon we have to deal with is a typical symptom of a general degeneration of human values. Following some deplorable working conditions in the 19th century, large improvements have been achieved in Europe during the 20th century, securing workers a decent way of living that seems to be imperishable. At the*

beginning of the 21st century, human beings and their social rights are in a very low ranking, where economical needs and profit become the centre of interest.»

The degradation has increased due in general of lack of legislation and lack of collective agreements in the field. The excessive long days are not an exclusively practice of a Country or a Continent. It is a Universal problem concerning the whole world. It is in fact a global problem.

A normal day of work in a feature film can easily reach 12 to 14 hours. There are even worse cases where a day of shooting can reach 18 hours. The week of work consists of 6 days and not 5 days.

The working timetable can as well change from night to day and day to night during the same week. A crew can easily start one week of work at day time to change to night work in the same week without any time to readjust the body metabolism to a new timetable of the day.

About excessive working hours a recent study recently published on the on-line magazine “Occupational and Environmental Medicine” it clearly states that “ *Working in jobs with schedules that routinely involve overtime work or extended hours increases the risk of suffering an occupational injury or illness* ”

For cinematographers the key issue is in fact safety of his crew and as well the quality of work. The involvement of cinematographers in this type of issue is in concern to the Conrad Hall’s ASC statement published in 2002. Many reactions arouse from fellow colleagues in concern of the situation to realize later that it is a common problem across the world. Very soon the issue was forgotten. The lack of opportunities to work, the fierce competition, the lack of legislation has pushed the issue to silence.

It is against that silence that IMAGO keeps on bringing the subject to ashore. The responsibility of the cinematographer doesn’t rest alone on his creativity. Like Vitorio Storaro AIC once said « *our responsibility is to the visual image as well as the well being of our crew. I believe it is my obligation and the obligation of every Cinematographer around the world to oppose a practice that compromises our creative ability as well as the health and well being of every member of the crew.*»

The situation for free lancers in the film business has already over passed any line of conduct. It is already behind the humiliation limits. Like Haskell Wexler ASC one of the leading cinematographers in concern to this issue stated « *Why, when something that has been proven medically, scientifically, and practically, in human terms to be so corrosive, so damaging, so unsafe, does this continue? How is it possible, when everyone is aware of how destructive this is to our health and how dangerous this is to our lives, that working long hours not only continues in Hollywood and all over America, but has spread to other parts of the world? »*