

# VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS

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## **The Creative Teamsters**

*What if advertising people had a union?*

As a baseball fan, I get really sickened at the prospect of yet another players' strike. Then I get really intrigued at the same time.

If baseball players, actors, and screenwriters can form unions, why can't advertising professionals?

Advertising doesn't require heavy lifting, and unless your boss has an X-ACTO knife fetish or full-time PMS the work isn't dangerous, but our industry struggles with all the hot button issues that unions have traditionally tackled: job security, hours, benefit cutbacks, blatant age and sex discrimination, fill-in-yourgripe here.

Me, I've written TV and radio campaigns that were so effective they were still being aired long after I'd left the agencies I wrote them for, with not an extra penny or drop of credit to show for the effort.

If I had been a union VO talent on those spots instead of the copywriter, I might have been more properly compensated.

Let's also address the current state of staffing in the ad business today. Nothing is more pathetic than ad people who blurt out "I'm slammed" when you ask them how they're doing. Seems that nobody has the means to hire additional help, yet "slammed" is a sorry-ass way to live no matter what kind of work you're doing for a living.

So what if we all did something about the industry's current sorry state of affairs, like unionize and strike?

A strike would test the notion of how much impact a "superstar" employee has on the end product, how interchangeable ad pros really might be, and how much of a vendor-like commodity advertising is.

Just imagine, if you will, an advertising creatives' strike. While ad people are off picketing (or hanging out at the bar or Starbucks), agency owners and holding company executives could hire scabs.

Maybe the scabs would bring back the puns that were so in vogue 20 years ago. ("Makes Pasta Fasta" lives again!!) Maybe every ad would feature dogs, babies and big-ass logos. I imagine the work at Wieden would suffer tremendously, but nothing coming out of Grey would be any worse.

The weird part is, the more I think about an advertising union, the more, uh, anti-American it sounds. I mean, unions seem like such an Industrial Revolution throwback kind of thing, a 20th century solution to a 21st century problem.

However, as the ad industry becomes more centrally controlled, with more work being done by less people, and technology making it virtually impossible not to spend all of one's waking hours thinking about work, I wonder what the solution might be.

Two high-profile books coming out soon are predicting "the fall" and "the end" of advertising. Well, maybe some radical thinking could save the business.

Although Hollywood no longer employs the "studio system" that kept people bound for years, the screenwriters, actors, directors, and other groups still receive some form of protection for their labor.

The ad industry loves to compare itself to Hollywood, with our politicized work environments, our "creative superstar" system, and constant art vs. commerce battles. So, why not follow Hollywood's lead and unionize?

Hey, at least we'd have picket signs with killer headlines and art direction.