

# Late Shows Move to Help The Workers Not on Strike

By BILL CARTER

With no end in sight to the strike by writers against networks and production studios, several hosts of late-night shows have begun taking steps to ensure that their nonwriting staffs receive some portion of their pay, at least in the short term.

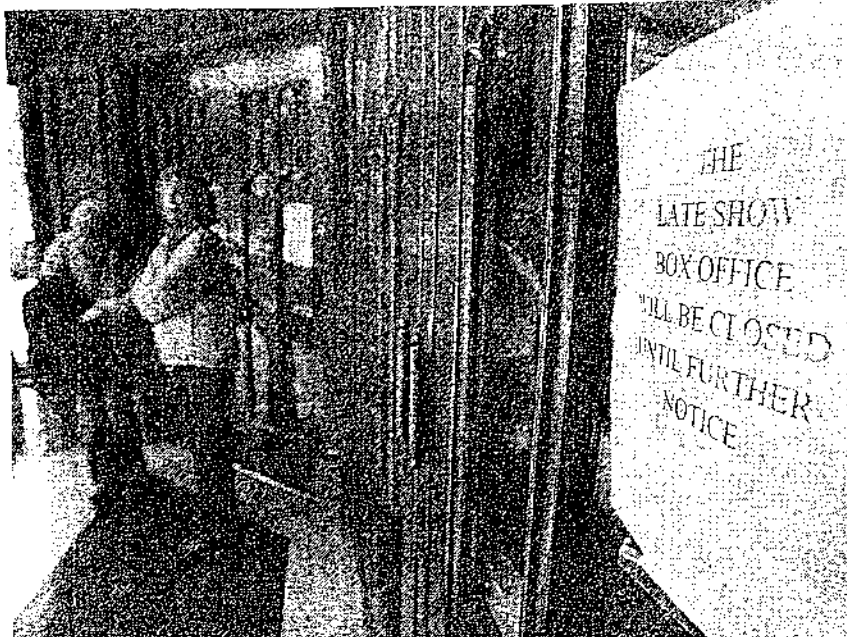
At the same time, producers of several shows, especially those based in New York, have been involved in back-channel talks in the last 10 days intended to find some way to get the shows back on the air as soon as possible.

Those efforts, which had hit some snags and might end after their existence was first reported last night on the Web site of the entertainment trade publication *Variety*, were intended to make sure none of the shows tried to break with the writers and come back on their own, according to several executives involved.

But one executive said the talks did not get much farther than questions about what each show might be planning to do over the next few weeks. The executive said the talks were not that different from communications that go on routinely among the late-night shows when they have issues in common.

Still, any move to bring the shows back could have been expected to be opposed by the Writers Guild, which has looked to the late-night shows as a first example of how the strike could be effective in halting TV production.

Meanwhile, one late-night host, David Letterman, made a move to ensure that the staff of his "Late Show" on CBS as well as Craig Ferguson's "Late Late Show" would continue be paid, although not in full. Mr. Letter-



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The sign at the box office of the Ed Sullivan Theater in New York tells the story: A writers' strike is preventing new taping.

man's production company, Worldwide Pants, owns both shows. The news of Mr. Letterman's plan was first reported on [DeadlineHollywood.com](http://DeadlineHollywood.com).

Yesterday, executives at two other late-night shows, "Tonight" and "Late Night" on NBC, said they were also working on plans to ensure their staff members would not face immediate layoffs and loss of income. An NBC spokeswoman, Rebecca Marks, said last night that NBC, which is a unit of General Electric, had assured the staffs of both shows that the network would continue to pay them for the next two weeks.

The late-night shows have 100 to 200 nonwriting employees.

The host of "Late Night," Conan O'Brien, had been concerned enough to make a specific pledge to pay his staff members out of his own pocket should that need arise. But Mr. O'Brien does not own his show, and NBC pays for his staff.

Jeff Ross, the executive producer of Mr. O'Brien's show, said: "Conan has made an offer to pay to keep the staff going as long as possible. Conan has been telling the network for some time that he will go into his own pocket for this. But we're hoping it

will not be necessary because G.E.'s pockets are a lot deeper than Conan's."

Through this week, the Letterman employees were being paid their full salaries. Yesterday, Worldwide Pants issued a statement said that shows scheduled for next week have been canceled and a decision has been made about how to continue to pay the nonwriting staff.

The statement did not spell out the formula, but an executive involved in the decision described the economic breakdown: An employee making \$2,000 a week or less would be paid in full. For salaries above \$2,000 a week, the employee would receive 50 percent of anything over \$2,000, except that no employee would receive more than \$4,000 a week.

The staffs of the two Worldwide Pants shows have been promised that they would receive the payments through at least the beginning of January, although the shows go back into production before then. The executive, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the details of the compensation were private, said that the shows would decide whether to continue to cancel production on a week-by-week basis.