

**JON VOIGHT**

January 25, 2005

Dear Fellow Actors,

Please know that I am deeply moved by your recent nomination for SAG's "Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Television Movie," and I want to express my sincere gratitude for that honor. Since then, you may have heard that the SAG board has excluded me from the awards ceremony on February 5, 2005. The published explanation given for my exclusion is not accurate, and I feel I owe a truthful explanation so that what happened to me, should never happen to another actor.

The truth is that during the Summer of 2003, I was approached by a dear friend who had a lifetime vision of directing a piece he had written. He explained to me he had very little money and he would need to feel complete freedom, if there was any possibility to bring his vision to fruition.

When I read the script, I was so moved! It was original, it was spiritual, and I felt it would be important, and an answer to many of our personal sufferings. It wasn't too long before other people felt the same as I did, and supplied just enough minimal funds so my friend could begin work on his project.

I knew by law I could participate in the project without violating the Guild's rule against non-union work by electing "financial core" status. I called the Guild to request that status. My request was met with fear and panic from the SAG officer in charge of "financial core." "Jon, you must not do this," she said. "You will open the door to all our actors running for financial core." I thought to myself, "What's so bad about that? There could be multiple reasons, financial and otherwise, why many creative people might want to do a non-union movie under the protection of 'financial core.' 'Core' membership is an entitlement of any union member, protected by federal law." I needed a few days to think about this.

Before I had arrived at a solution, all hell broke loose! Suddenly, there was what can only be described as a brutal attack on the small production, not only by SAG, but other unions as well. They came down hard. It was vicious and ugly. I thought I was living a part in the film, On the Waterfront.

Our Guild exacerbated the assault with the false announcement to the press that I was the film's producer. My peers, who were rushed off to join the angry mob on picket lines, had no idea that I was not the producer, and that I had not worked one day as an actor on the film, but the false information they were led to believe was immediately released to the press.

The unions' scare tactics worked. The crew was frightened to continue, and a small filmmaker's creative endeavor was shut down after 2½ weeks of work, leaving great financial losses.

The ugliness did not end. The attacks on me and the production continued on with vicious taunts and lies spread over the internet. It went on for months, leaving in its wake extreme stress and mental anguish for all involved. If this could happen to me, a veteran actor of 40 years and an Academy Award Winner, I shuddered to think what would be in store for other actors. I wouldn't want this to happen to anyone ever again.

Because of all the cruel bullying and unfair play, I then decided to apply for "financial core" to see if I could help salvage in any way this original pure vision. I understood that I would give up my right to vote in union matters, but I would be able to work legally in non-SAG films, as well as SAG films. As a "financial core" member, I willingly pay the same dues as all other SAG members, which support the efforts of the Guild to negotiate and administer our contracts, efforts I concur with. I contribute and participate in the various benefit funds on the same basis as a full member. Given the structure of the contracts, my support of the Guild exceeds that of most members.

I would hope to think that the anguish and stress that was put upon me would have been enough, but it was not. The SAG board chose to bring me once again what they think is shame, and apparently to warn other actors off joining financial core, by announcing to the press that I was not invited to the ceremony to which my fellow actors nominated me for a union film. All this is because of my willingness to uphold the right to our personal pursuit of freedom and liberty. I am neither sorry nor ashamed for my decision to join "financial core." My sorrow comes only for a union that can be a great force, that can accomplish much good, and protect, promote, and nourish the actor in his individual pursuits, but does not yet understand that there will be some that will be happy to follow the union in all its rules and regulations, but there may be some that will differ, and follow a destiny of their own choosing, and that is their right, and that is our country's Constitution.

I congratulate all my fellow nominees, and wish everyone the best.

With great sincerity,

