

# GOING GLOBAL:



Photo: Carol Racicot

The GPOP gang, including elected leaders and staff from eight unions, FIA and observers from UBCP, ACTRA Maritimes, ACTRA Montreal and ACTRA Toronto Performers.

## National unions participating at GPOP

**ACTRA** (Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists) [www.actra.ca](http://www.actra.ca)

**AEA** (Actors Equity Association – U.S.) [www.actorsequity.org](http://www.actorsequity.org)

**AFTRA** (American Federation of Television and Radio Artists) [www.aftra.org](http://www.aftra.org)

**CAEA** (Canadian Actors' Equity Association) [www.caea.com](http://www.caea.com)

**Equity (U.K.)** [www.equity.org.uk](http://www.equity.org.uk)

**MEAA** (Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance – Australia) [www.alliance.org.au](http://www.alliance.org.au)

**New Zealand Actors' Equity**

**SAG** (Screen Actors Guild – U.S.) [www.sag.org](http://www.sag.org)

# ACTRA HOSTS GPOP

## Global protection of performers (GPOP) a kickstart to 'bigger-picture' thinking on international rights of performers

by Jamie Bradley

So, I'm cooking some semi-nutritious dinner for my family when I get a call from Thor. "As the new National Treasurer, I think it'd be a good idea if you came to the **GPOP Meeting** in two weeks."

GPOP... GPOP... I need a glossary for all the acronyms that abound in our business.

I check my calendar, no auditions, no work (not usually a good thing). "I serve at the pleasure of the President," I say, and then begin the thinking process.

GPOP... **Global Protection Of Performers** – ACTRA's progressive National President's initiative within **FIA** (the International Federation of Actors. Yes, we use the French acronym but the English translation. Sigh.) GPOP was a meeting of the English-speaking unions of FIA "to assess the current levels of global protection offered to performers in the fields of theatre and audio-visual production." Phew.

On Saturday, Feb. 16th I suddenly found myself in the boardroom of ACTRA National, noshing and settling in my chair for two days of international chatting. On the table in front of me lay my info-package, a pad of paper, three pens and too many small plates of breakfast items. At the table around me milled about actor and staff representatives from quite a few acronymic

organizations: **ACTRA, AEA, AFTRA, CAEA, MEAA, SAG**; some unions that use words: **Equity U.K.**, and **New Zealand Actors' Equity**; and some observing members from ACTRA Montreal, Toronto and B.C. branches (I also represented the Maritimes).

ACTRA's calm and collected NED **Stephen Waddell** rapped the gavel and we were out of the gate.

Okay, the first topic of discussion was 'what defines a domestic or international production.' This is fairly important because it deals with government funding, international co-production treaties (Canada has fifty-five!) and union jurisdiction. Canada and Australia look at the nationality of all the key creative people; Equity U.K. doesn't make that distinction, while SAG considers the nationality of whichever entity owns the copyright over the final work. This last one is a bit murky when you remember that Universal Studios was owned by Seagrams and is now owned by a French winemaker.

Item two opened the floodgates. SAG and its **Global Rule One Campaign**.

SAG has a lot of members – about 98,000, (ACTRA has about 18,000) – and not a lot of their middle class actors are working. As we've seen in the news over the past couple of years, many of them



Photo: Carol Racicot

Dominick Luquer (FIA) and Thor Bishopric (ACTRA) getting the GPOP meeting underway.

blame so-called 'runaway productions.' Now, I don't have the space to really get into the whole 'runaway production' morass but let's just say that this isn't a new thing... after all, *Mary Poppins* and *Star Wars* could be considered 'runaway productions.' Even the term 'runaway production' is in dispute – there are many definitions. ACTRA's official position holds that in a global film and television industry, productions that locate in Canada aren't 'runaway' from anywhere... they're Canadian productions.

SAG now sees the rise in so-called runaway productions as a serious situation and SAG members are frustrated. What has developed is the famous 'us versus them' attitude and Canadian flags being burned at Hollywood and Vine. One of the purposes of this GPOP meeting was to clarify some cross-border rhetoric. So, let's get into it.

To make sure the SAG members are covered by the SAG contract no matter where they go in the world to work, SAG is enforcing Global Rule One.

All eyes and mouths aimed at the SAG reps – you see, once a performer crosses a border it's usually into some other union's jurisdiction.

We were told that SAG members are concerned with the loss of **Pension & Health**

### GPOP glossary

**GPOP** – Global Protection of Performers. The name of the FIA meeting of English-speaking unions hosted by ACTRA on February 16, 17, 2002.

**FIA** – International Federation of Actors. ACTRA is affiliated to this international

body representing the unions of actors, singers, dancers and other performers throughout the world. [www.fia-actors.com](http://www.fia-actors.com)  
**INCD** – International Network for Cultural Diversity. The INCD is a worldwide network of artists and cultural groups dedicated to countering the homogenizing effects of globalization on culture. Made

up of artists from all continents, ranging from new media artists to traditional artisans, organizations from more than 50 countries belong to the network. ACTRA is an active member of the INCD, and a founding member of the Canadian Coalition for Cultural Diversity. [www.incd.net](http://www.incd.net) and [www.cdc-ccd.org](http://www.cdc-ccd.org)

Photo: Carol Racicot



R.H. Thomson addresses the meeting.

The INCD is a 'worldwide network of artists and cultural groups dedicated to countering the homogenizing effects of globalization on culture'... or 'hey, give us a chance to tell our stories too.'

(we call it **Insurance & Retirement**). It would take a bilateral agreement for the host union to transfer the collected monies down to SAG. This is called 'pass through' and ACTRA and SAG already have a limited form of a 'pass through' understanding. (Similar bilateral agreements with the other unions would seem to solve this problem.)

Dues payments would be affected also, especially with our dual members. If you have to work under a SAG contract everywhere, then would the dues from dual members be deducted and sent across the border every time you work in Canada? This might have a pretty big effect on your ACTRA membership and I & R.

It was mentioned by many of the unions that if a SAG actor negotiates SAG rates and working conditions with the producer, these can be incorporated into the host union's contract.

How Global Rule One is going to help the middle class or second-tier SAG performer, I'm not sure. Which is cheaper for a producer shooting in Canada: a 'non-recognizable' American performer for SAG rates in American money or an equally 'non-recognizable' Canadian actor for ACTRA rates with our 62¢ dollar and tax credits?

It was clear that SAG hasn't to date considered all of the possible international ramifications of GR1. They're going to launch it on May 1st and before that date will attempt to work out implementation details. At the end of the day, one hopes that they're not going to end up with a 700-page tome of Global Rule One with 130 amendments and a lot of international hard feelings.

As you can probably tell, GR1 took up a chunk o' time.

ACTRA member and cultural activist **R.H. Thomson** spoke to the meeting about the **International Network for Cultural Diversity**. The INCD is a 'worldwide network of artists and cultural groups dedicated to countering the homogenizing effects of globalization on culture'... or

'hey, give us a chance to tell our stories too.' Thomson calls it an "individual expression of consciousness."

Here's one of the problems in our country: 0.2% of English-Canada's film screens show Canadian movies. Our filmmakers can't get their projects out there and our performers can't get our faces out there. The rest of the English-speaking countries share our plight. It is difficult breaking the hold Hollywood has on our eyeballs.

The SAG members were concerned that INCD might be a tool for America-bashing and Thomson assured them that INCD was an all-inclusive organization. But really, no matter how you slice it, there is the problem of global mass culture, which is a diplomatic way of saying global American culture.

At the end of the GPOP weekend, what was accomplished? Although the general consensus around the table was that SAG had a right to protect its members, the way they're going about Global Rule One could have been better thought out. **John McGuire** of SAG said that the concerns of the GPOP meeting would be taken back and considered while the GR1 document was being written.

There was talk of a global collective agreement, but we've got eight unions from five countries all with very different laws and a whole bunch of countries that don't have collective bargaining unions at all. It would take a very long time and an oil tanker full of international lawyers to figure that one out. Still, this group was undaunted and decided that a legal sub-committee would be set up to discuss a way to enforce protections.

Here's the big action of the GPOP Meeting – each union will list their top five concerns in three categories: **Residual Structures, Rights and Working Conditions**. Along with those, they'll send the applicable sections of their agreements to the FIA office where all will be compiled into a document that'll be reviewed when

## SAG's Rule One

**RULE ONE** in SAG's National Constitution states that SAG members agree not to work for producers who have not signed a SAG contract. SAG's Global Rule One campaign is about enforcing this rule on a global stage. SAG is seeking the extension of their jurisdiction by declaring that the SAG contract will follow SAG members wherever they go in the world to work.

The rule is not that different from the commitment of ACTRA members when they join ACTRA – the commitment not to work non-union.

Presently, when SAG members are engaged in the U.S. and come north to Canada, they may sign contracts where they are promised 'SAG working conditions,' but the producers aren't necessarily signatories to a SAG agreement. The global extension of SAG's Rule One puts the onus on the performer to make sure they are working on a SAG contract whenever they work outside the U.S.

Where Global Rule One gets complicated is with performers who are dual members. What about a Canadian who is both a SAG and an ACTRA member? When home in Canada, does the actor have to work on a SAG contract because she's a SAG member? What about when she wants to work under the ACTRA contract when at home, to receive the protection the ACTRA contract provides, and to support ACTRA with her union dues?

While ACTRA supports SAG's right to enforce Global Rule One, we seek SAG's clarification on how they will handle the situation of dual members – an issue that we discussed at the GPOP meeting.

In order to protect and assert ACTRA's jurisdiction, we are working with SAG to resolve how Global Rule One will be applied to performers working in Canada prior to the implementation date of May 1, 2002.

FIA reconvenes in the summer. If all goes well, we could end up with a template each union could use when collective bargaining – a Declaration of Basic Actor's Rights. And that's pretty good for only two days' work.