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Saw a bunch of “it IS fair for a network to just decide not to air a completed TV season, because everyone who worked on it still got paid” tweets so I wanted to talk about some of the nuances of that.

First of all yes, of course it’s legal. It’s happened for decades — but it was very rare, and now it’s frequent. (It used to usually mean that a network burned off completed episodes on like, Saturday nights, but still aired them)

I’m not going to talk about how it feels to have 100s of people’s artwork thrown in the trash, because that’s just a feeling. It’s emotional. It’s the worst part by far, but... let’s talk business.

One thing not everyone knows is when you shop a new project, if you’re lucky, you get multiple bites. So let’s say both Amazon & HBOMax want to buy your new show. They then make a case for why they’re the best home for your new “baby.”

When you decide to go with a certain studio or streamer, you’re putting your trust in them because they *convinced* you to. You meet with creative teams who promised to advocate for the show. So many people tell you “we believe in your vision and this project.”

You make sure you’re aligned creatively. You see potential budgets. Promises are made and one of those promises is “we will do everything in our power to make this show successful.”

Once you sign that deal, the studio/streamer is your boss. You make the show the way they ask you to make it. You take their notes. They approve every single detail of each script, and then of each cut.

They get dailies and if they don’t like what they see, they call you and you adjust everything to make sure it’s to their liking. If they want a rewrite, a reshoot, a recast, you find a way to do that. BECAUSE THEY ARE GOING TO AIR IT.

(So the whole “well you should’ve made a better show if you wanted them to air it” thing doesn’t fly. They chose it, and they shaped it, just as much as the writers/cast/crew.)

You do your job, hold up your part of the deal, the way they ask you to. Then they decide they don’t want to do their part of the job — for a tax break. And suddenly you’re paid, but you’re NOT getting the support you were promised as part of the deal.

This is becoming commonplace at a time when pay is VERY LOW. We get paid by the episode, not by the week of full-time (often round-the-clock) work. But it now can take 18 months to do 8 episodes, when it used to take 9 months to do 22 episodes.

Your landlord/mortgage/mouths to feed do not get paid by the episode.

So when you sign a deal, it’s not just about pay. You’re promised a whole bunch of things in addition to a paycheck. Not the least of which is an aired project that you will continue to build your career from.

Everyone in this business builds their future on the back of their most recent project. When we decide to put a year or more of work into a season of TV we’re making a decision about our career direction.

The best comparison I can make is it’s almost like if you want to become a restaurant manager, so you work at a restaurant for a year doing EVERYTHING you’re told, and then corporate says “thanks for great work, but you can’t put this year on your resume.” There’s just this hole.

Yeah, you got paid. But you have nothing to show for the experience you have now.

So this “trend” of killing completed projects for corporate tax breaks isn’t just sad, it’s a direct betrayal of promises made when deals are signed. We’re going to have to start to need language in our contracts, or penalties maybe, to shift this — but that will be very hard.

(And everyone saying "your union needs to address this" yeah yeah yeah, our union will, but... add it to the very long list of things we have to fight for this year. We never win them all.)