



The New Zealand Hobbit Crisis: How Warner Bros. Bent a Government to Its Will and Crushed an Attempt to Unionize 'The Hobbit'

Jonathan Handel

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All was not well in Middle-earth....

After the third Lord of the Rings movie premiered in 2003, fans of the series eagerly anticipated production and release of its prequel, *The Hobbit*. It turned out they had a while to wait, as a series of troubles delayed production for years.

Then, in September 2010, when almost everything seemed resolved, U.S. and international actors unions issued a public alert advising their members "not to accept work on this non-union production." Warner Bros. threatened to rip the troubled production from the country and events quickly spiraled out of control.

New Zealand plunged into crisis. Saving *The Hobbit* was do or die for the local film industry, and the government scrambled to avoid disaster.

Protests and rallies erupted and the island nation's currency fell on the possibility of losing the half-billion dollar project. Director Peter Jackson vowed to "fight like hell" to keep the shoot in New Zealand.

But then studio executives flew in from Los Angeles like colonial masters ready to bring down the hammer. What happened next was almost unbelievable - and proved, if nothing else, that not all Hollywood drama is on the screen.

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