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Supporting the paid and unpaid staff of
KPFA Pacifica Radio 94.1FM

What's going on at KPFA?

In November, Pacifica executive director Arlene Englehardt took KPFA's Morning Show off the air, laid off its two paid hosts, Aimee Allison and Brian Edwards-Tiekert, and refused to allow the Morning Show's regular unpaid staff to do their segments. Englehardt attributed the move to an economic crisis.

But many KPFA staff -- both paid and unpaid -- believe the real story is more complex. KPFA's union contract says that any economic layoffs must be done by seniority, and these two were not the least senior people. Also, an alternative budget supported by many KPFA workers shows ways to achieve savings while preserving staff.

Isn't KPFA in a financial crisis? What alternatives did it have to layoffs?

Budgets aren't only about numbers: They're about priorities. KPFA is in a financial crisis partly due to the economy, and partly because of serious mismanagement at its parent network, Pacifica.

KPFA's union staff has proposed a "Sustainable Budget" that would have created some savings on health benefits, cut some of Pacifica's bureaucratic overhead, and preserved KPFA's ability to serve its community and continue raising the money it needs to survive.

Added up, the union's proposals would have saved KPFA more than three times the salaries of the people who were laid off. Local management and KPFA's local board joined workers in supporting the changes, but Pacifica rejected all of the proposals.

Why does it matter whether KPFA has a union?

From KQED to the New York Times to NBC, media workers traditionally choose to unionize. This collective voice improves working conditions, and benefits the public by promoting investment in coverage and programming, even during times of financial difficulty.

People at KPFA have sacrificed over the years to create protections for programmers, including a union contract that guarantees a work environment where fundamental rights are protected. One of those rights is fair treatment and protection from unfair termination -- the reason KPFA contracts have included a seniority rule for decades.

Like any form of organizing, unions help people exercise power collectively. Solidarity is a powerful tool. Those who succeed in fostering divisions among the KPFA staff, paid and unpaid, will weaken the ability of those who care about the station to work together.

Do KPFA's union staff support unpaid workers?

KPFA would not exist without the incredible work of its unpaid staff. Paid workers understand that -- and training, supporting and working with unpaid staff is part of their jobs.

CWA's contract with KPFA has ancillary benefits for unpaid staff: It guarantees they're compensated fairly when they pick up paid shifts, it establishes enforceable standards for a healthy work environment, and it forces management to either transfer existing staff into open positions (such as during a budget crisis) or go through open processes for hiring -- which means unpaid staff get a chance to apply.

Do unpaid staff and volunteers support the union?

Many are strong supporters of labor rights for themselves and coworkers, and are working in solidarity with their sisters and brothers in the paid staff. Unpaid staff are an essential part of the coalition working for a stronger, healthier KPFA. Please see many statements of solidarity from unpaid staff on KPFAWorker.org.

What has Pacifica done to threaten KPFA's union?

In violation of the contract, Pacifica has

- failed to engage in good-faith negotiations over alternatives to layoffs,
- retaliated against union members who spoke up over impending layoffs by singling them out for termination, and
- broken the seniority protections and layoff procedures in KPFA's union contract to carry out those retaliatory layoffs, and
- libeled the union by publishing false allegations that union members had proposed laying off the staff of local programs,
- spent KPFA's listeners' donations on an expensive management-side law firm to fight fairly routine grievances.

Why doesn't CWA's bargaining unit include the unpaid staff and volunteers who work at KPFA?

This is out of CWA's control: the National Labor Relations Board has ruled (http://www.glib.com/nlrb_08-26-99.pdf) that unpaid staff can't be in a unionized bargaining unit because they don't meet the definition of "employee" under the National Labor Relations Act. KPFA's unpaid staff have organized a separate "Unpaid Staff Organization", but it has never engaged in collective bargaining with station management over working conditions.

I'm interested in radio, not station politics. Why should I care?

It's going to take all of us working together to stop Pacifica and save what we love about this station.

Like it or not, some are trying to fundamentally change the character of KPFA, making it less locally controlled. Divisions among the staff, paid and unpaid, hurt our ability to fight back. Together, we can restore local control of programming, create a safe work environment and promote a sustainable budget that values radio programming -- not bureaucratic overhead.

What can I do?

Sign the solidarity statement. Talk to coworkers about what's going on. Let Pacifica know that divide-and-conquer tactics won't work -- that we stand together to put radio first. Urge the station to provide all of its important community programming with the resources we need to move forward and grow.