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

A short labor history of KPFA

KPFA's work is made possible by both unpaid and paid staff. Paid staff at KPFA are represented by CWA Local 9415. While unpaid staff at KPFA do not have collective bargaining rights under existing labor law, many are strong supporters of labor rights for themselves and coworkers, and believe in solidarity with their sisters and brothers in the paid staff, and working together for a stronger, healthier station. Both paid and unpaid staff are voting members of the Pacifica Foundation, and together elect 6 representatives to their 24-member local station board.

In the mid-1990s, Pacifica management made it clear they intended to get tough with KPFA's union. Pacifica management hired an anti-union consultant to fight the existing union, United Electric workers (or UE), which represented KPFA, WBAI and KPFA staff. At KPFA, while unpaid staff were not dues-paying members of the union and were rarely active in it, they had some protections under the contract, such as reimbursement and grievance rights.

Pacifica went to the National Labor Relations Board to challenge the unpaid staff's rights. The NLRB made a ruling, which remains in effect to this day, that unpaid staff be excluded from the union. (See http://www.glib.com/nlrb_08-26-99.pdf)

Later, in 1999, Pacifica also hired armed guards, locked the staff out of KPFA and piped in programming from afar. After more than 2 weeks, staff and community solidarity forced the network to back down and reopen the station.

By the mid 1990s, many Bay Area manufacturing businesses had closed and UE's membership base had shifted to Southern California; the closest local was in Los Angeles. When the UE contract expired, KPFA's paid staff decided they needed a union that was better positioned to help them fight Pacifica. With the support of UE, and after the old contract had expired, they chose to organize with the Communications Workers of America Local 9415, which had a thriving local in the East Bay and represented thousands of other Bay Area workers.

In 1997, groups of unpaid staff attended a series of meetings with CWA representatives, who offered to represent the unpaid staff, to the extent legally possible. However, at that time, not enough unpaid staff members were interested in joining the union.

All staff, whatever their status, should have workplace protections such as a grievance procedure, a safe and healthy working environment, reimbursement for expenses, etc. We invite all staff to come together to discuss these issues, in the spirit of cooperation and for a better KPFA.

For more information, contact us at kpfaworker@gmail.com.