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Board Members to be Punished for Protesting at KPFA?

by an observer, published in IndyBay.org/media

Behind the scenes at KPFA Free Speech Radio

You might think that "KPFA" and "protests" go together like red beans and rice. And indeed, one of the hallmarks of KPFA's distinguished history has been its coverage of antiwar demonstrations -- from Vietnam to Reagan's wars in Central America, to the invasion of Iraq, and up to today's US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza. And of course one of the reasons KPFA is still here today was the massive 1999 street protests on behalf of the station.

So if listeners are concerned that today's KPFA is straying from its noble heritage, wouldn't a protest be appropriate? Two of KPFA's Local Station Board (LSB) members thought so, but now they're confronting trumped-up (pun intended) charges that could have led to their expulsion from the Board. As it happened, they were suspended from the next year and a half of the office they were duly elected to. (Possibly because there was no 2/3s vote available to eject them.)

The "accused" are labor activists Steve Zeltzer and Lisa Milos. who were both elected to the LSB in 2023 (Steve also hosted a labor show on KPFA for years, until management canceled it without explanation). On July 31, they and some allies (including a third LSB member, former Berkeley City Councilperson Cheryl Davila) demonstrated outside the KPFA building on Martin Luther King Way in Berkeley.

They talked about multiple issues, including the Protectors attempt to undermine the broadcast-license-renewal of KPFA sister station WBAI, which culminated in an FCC ruling that put new constraints on the fundraising activities of all five Pacifica radio stations, including KPFA. They also called on KPFA to improve its programming by dropping the Washington-centric, pro-intervention 'Background Briefing' show, to make way for pro-peace local voices.

A more peaceful and innocuous protest would be hard to imagine -- only a few people present, on the sidewalk outside the KPFA building, not interfering with KPFA's activity. There were protest signs, but they were taped to the wall of the building with blue painter's tape, so as not to leave any mark when taken down.

But even this tiny demo obviously drew the ire of KPFA's business manager. She came out of the building, argued briefly with the demonstrators, then grabbed one of the protest signs. Steve pulled the sign away from her (it's unknown what brand of politics she espouses, or whether she's aware of the role that protests have played in KPFA's history).

Incredibly, some LSB members from the "Protectors" faction are referring to the few seconds' of tugging over the protest sign as an act of "assault and battery".

At a "trial" which took place at an LSB (private)"Executive Session" on 11/16 the two were suspended from serving out the next 18 months of their membership on the KPFA Local Station Board to which they were elected. In an email one of the Protectors even referred an"unauthorized sign," clearly not comprehending that KPFA, at its best, has been the place for unauthorized opinions to be heard.

And what about Lisa Milos? She's accused of "making inaccurate statements" about the protest, in a posting to an email list. She too was "on trial," and could have been expelled from the board by a two-thirds vote at the November 16 meeting.

Since the LSB is not a court or other department of government, it isn't subject to the rules that bind state and federal governments. And indeed, the "Protectors" have already shown they have no intention of respecting the rights that defendants Steve and Lisa would have in an actual court of law: the Sixth Amendment to the US Constitution guarantees defendants the right to a "speedy and public trial." Yet the Protectors intend to hold their trial in secret ("Executive Session"). The Sixth Amendment also specifies says a defendant has the right to "be confronted with the witnesses against him." But the Protectors have already declared that the business manager (and her boss, the general manager) won't attend the LSB meeting.

As an NGO, KPFA is not bound by the Bill of Rights. But shouldn't a media organization that broadcasts programs about "peace and justice" make certain to, at a minimum, follow the same rules that apply to governments, if not go above and beyond them?

Moreover, while it occupies itself with manufactured internal battles like this one, the Protectors faction members who dominate the LSB are doing nothing for the benefit of the radio station whose listeners elected them. The LSB is required to do an annual performance evaluation of the KPFA General Manager, but the last GM was evaluated only once in his nine-year tenure. And although that manager resigned more than two years ago, the LSB still has not started a hiring process for a new one.

It never even followed through on the manager's request to create a fundraising committee. The LSB needs to be told to disband its circular firing squad, and actually do some useful work, and there is much to do.

The Protectors apparently intended to keep the November 16th Zoom meeting secret. There was no way for KPFA supporters to attend and listen. But anyone with an opinion to share can email the LSB, at [kpfalsb \[at\] googlegroups.com](mailto:kpfalsb@googlegroups.com), and to the Pacifica National Board (PNB) at [pnb \[at\] pacifica.org](mailto:pnb@pacifica.org)

Thanks!

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