



March 16, 2014

**For Immediate Release**

Contact: Summer Reese Email: pacificainexile@mail.com Phone: (510) 333-1965

**Here We Go Again: Locks and Surveillance Return to Martin Luther King Jr Way**

*Troubled Radio Network Resorts to Hardware to Lock Out Employees From National Headquarters*

**Berkeley** -In a familiar refrain, the brand new chair of the Pacifica National Board could be found on the morning Friday March 14th barricading the doors of a small building at 1925 Martin Luther King Jr Way in Berkeley. After only six weeks on the job, the barricade was being erected against the organization's executive director Summer Reese, a woman thirty years her junior, who had just been presented with a 3-year contract for employment only six weeks earlier, after working for 20 months as an interim in the executive director position. Reese had been the chair of Pacifica's National Board for the previous 3 years, but she never found herself pressed into duty as an ad-hoc locksmith. The network's employees, who usually work in the building on Friday, were nowhere to be found.

This was not the first time the building containing the nation's first non-commercial listener-sponsored radio operation locked out its employees and found itself decorated with a padlock, but it may be one of the strangest. The evening before, a virtually newly-elected board (seated a mere 43 days before) rejected legal counsel, tabled every matter on the evening's agenda, rushed into a secretive closed session, voided a contract signed before they were seated, and immediately terminated Reese.

According to as many as 10 members of the board of directors and as reported to the *New York Times*, no reason was offered and little discussion ensued prior to a narrow vote.

The radio network had announced just a few hours earlier that it had successfully paid off a quarter million dollars in severance pay for laid-off employees at it's New York division WBAI-FM, a financial obligation many had feared would lead to the sale of one of the network's real estate properties and leave one of its stations homeless.

Padlocks were last installed in Berkeley in the summer of 1999, when the Pacifica National Board responded to the on-air revelation of an email by board member Michael Palmer of the proposed sale of one of the network's five noncommercial radio licenses and intentions to shut down operations and reprogram other stations. Long-time news reporter and radio host Dennis Bernstein read the misdirected email on the air at KPFA-FM and found himself forcibly removed by security guards who emptied and padlocked the station, which remained unoccupied for 19 days. Several years and many lawsuits later, the network emerged from receivership with a new organizational structure that allowed station members to elect their representatives to local and national board of directors.

The ensuing decade has been tumultuous for Pacifica as the organization has experienced dramatic management instability with 11 people serving as the executive director and almost constant turnover in the station manager positions. Recently, a request for proposals was issued for a leasing agreement for the New York signal and several board members have publicly called for the outright sale of the New York signal. Reese was known not to have favored a license sale.

The network's insurance broker had recently written a letter warning the board of directors that Pacifica's high level of employment litigation posed a threat of "uninsurability" and future litigation was to be avoided.

Rumors that the employee lockout executed by the new chair of the board, Margy Wilkinson, and now herself the interim executive director, had potentially cost the network as much as a million in government funding proved to be unsubstantiated, as the fired executive director had arranged for the required forms to be filed remotely, although her employment had been terminated at midnight the day before.

The abrupt firing of the executive director, despite a signed contract, echoes similarly reckless behavior by the Pacifica National Board that includes an equally abrupt rehiring of a chief financial officer despite coworker complaints, a 2012 990 form that had to be amended after filing, and a 13-month bank reconciliation backlog at the Berkeley station, and a confrontation between a human resources lawyer hired by the network and some of the network's board members in early February at a DC-area board meeting.

10 members of the network's board of directors, who consider themselves an embattled minority on the 22-person board have expressed consistent distress at the recent actions of the board and called for board members to pay attention to their fiduciary responsibilities and cease their reckless and irresponsible behavior. Many have publicly speculated that members of the board wish to dissolve the 65-year-old radio network and are using their elected positions on the board of directors to try to drive the organization into a state of collapse deliberately.

Started in 1946 by conscientious objector Lew Hill, Pacifica's storied history includes impounded program tapes for a 1954 in-air discussion of marijuana, broadcasting the Seymour Hersh revelations of the My Lai massacre, bombings by the Ku Klux Klan, going to jail rather than turning over the Patty Hearst tapes to the FBI, and Supreme Court cases including the 1984 decision that noncommercial broadcasters have the constitutional right to editorialize, and the Seven Dirty Words ruling following George Carlin's incendiary performances on WBAI.

###

*Pacifica Foundation Radio operates noncommercial radio stations in New York, Washington, Houston, Los Angeles, and the San Francisco Bay Area, and syndicates content to over 180 affiliates. It invented listener-supported radio.*