

## **A Vision of Pacifica**

Message from Mya Shone to the Takeback WBAI meeting, Tuesday, November 30, 2010

Thanks for giving Ralph and me the opportunity to speak during this important meeting. He is away and I shall speak on behalf of both of us.

Even liberals, such as Bob Herbert, realize that we are in the midst of a war against working people. His column in the *New York Times*, November 26, is titled: *Winning the Class War* and he starts off by saying: "The class war that no one wants to talk about continues unabated."

Now more than ever, Pacifica can serve as a significant tool, a fighting instrument, for political and social change or it can become an apparatus of the ruling class, like other media. Now more than ever, we should reach millions of people through the nationwide network of stations and affiliates to struggle for change and to build our own political party reflecting the interests of working people and all the oppressed.

As you are aware, Ralph Schoenman and I decided to stop producing *Taking Aim* on WBAI. It was a difficult decision after having built a large loyal listenership during our nine years of weekly broadcasting.

Rather than discuss here our reasons, I'm going to outline a vision of WBAI and Pacifica. You may remember when Pacifica was on the cutting edge of broadcasting with some of these ideas; others may be new.

There was a time when the stations encouraged people to participate in civil rights and anti-war marches and demonstrations and to attend community-organized music festivals. These were broadcast live with remote coverage at the podium and individual reporters spread throughout the crowd. Today, we are told that Pacifica broadcasters cannot encourage people to attend demonstrations – to do so incurs a legal liability. Why do we exist if not to promote involvement in movements for change?

There was a time when broadcasting political lectures and having discussions about them were the norm. In 1982, for example, when Ralph Schoenman organized American Workers and Artists for Solidarnarsc (Polish Solidarity) and held a meeting in Town Hall with Gore Vidal, Kurt Vonnegut, E.L. Doctorow, Susan Sontag, Paul Robeson Jr. and major labor leaders, WBAI was there to record and broadcast it. When he took the event on the road and brought it to Los Angeles as well as other major cities, KPFK re-broadcast the New York event in order to encourage people to attend the one in Los Angeles and then broadcast the Los Angeles event live.

Cutting edge/avant garde music, theater, and literature events and discussion should be heard regularly. There are many commercial stations devoted to easy listening rock, jazz and classical music. Pacifica should see it as its responsibility to introduce people to innovative ideas, just as when WBAI

broadcast John Cage or reading James Joyce's Ulysses on-air was an annual event.

News and public affairs should be a priority not an afterthought. Pacifica should be on the picket line and broadcasting daily about workers' struggles and fightbacks nationally and internationally. Instead, KPFA destroyed its volunteer labor collective and relegated labor news to a one-half hour commentary during the morning show once/week. Building Bridges, WBAI's weekly labor show may be the only labor magazine on the network.

There was a time when Public Service Announcements were played for community political, social events and lectures. Today we are told that this only can be done if there is an official 501c3 non-profit organization sponsoring the event. This relegates most announcements to a brief moment on the community calendar rather than on-going announcements and discussion that demonstrate the station's commitment to having people participate in events taking place in our communities.

Let me say that the current coup that has taken place in Pacifica is one of many over the years. I was a volunteer newscaster and had a public affairs show at KPFB in the early 1980s when the local management was taken over by the national office and the news and the public affairs department were decimated.

Has much has changed? When we first arrived at WBAI, the public affairs director had been a music programmer and eventually left WBAI to become a music director at another station. Since then, there has been a public affairs director who isn't knowledgeable about events — local, national or international — and considers personal health shows to be public affairs. This occurs at a moment when people are confronted with a political, economic and social crisis.

My vision of Pacifica also would devote extensive resources to creating a viable news department with knowledgeable reporters and not contract out this work as is done now with Free Speech Radio News.

Unique programs, such as Taking Aim, with its meticulous documentation and socialist analysis should be promoted nationally instead of marginalized. Pacifica stations refused to carry us even when strong support has been demonstrated by their membership.

Finally, the very structure of Pacifica with paid and unpaid staff, subsidized and un-subsidized shows makes for uneven broadcasting. Some producers are heavily subsidized like Amy Goodman of Democracy Now while others, such as Gary Null have wares to hawk and then there are the rest of us. While Pacifica states that it doesn't have commercials — in fact, it promotes the products and services of specific producers and has extended fund drives to the point where there is no consistent programming and the membership is worn out and, too often, driven away.

WBAI and the other stations are incredible resources for us. We support the struggle to Take Back WBAI and will go on to work with you to create a station and network that truly make an impact on the world.