Pacific Media Workers Guild
Planning process
Report and observations
By Paul Krissel, facilitator
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Background and process

I facilitated two meetings for the purpose of identifying strategic issues facing the PMWG and to begin the process of addressing those issues. The first meeting was June 15, 2013 and the second was September 21, 2013. At the first meeting, I reported data from interviews I had conducted with all Executive Committee members, all staff, the previous president, and some national staff. These interviews were not intended to result in a comprehensive analysis of the issues facing the guild. Rather, they served to provide me some background as I planned the agenda for the first meeting, and they served as the beginning of a conversation between Executive Committee members and staff that would continue at the first planning meeting.

As is the practice of PMWG, the June meeting was open to any interested member and several attended in addition to members of the Executive Committee and staff.

During the June meeting, I presented a summary of the data from the interviews. The assembled group then built upon that data and continued the discussion of the issues raised, and added new dimensions to the discussion. The result of the discussion was the identification of nearly a dozen potential areas of strategic focus. The assembled group agreed that three issues would be the top priority for next steps. They were: staffing, budget and the interests of the CFI unit to become a "well oiled machine". Volunteers offered to serve on these committees, which were tasked with taking the issues in these three areas raised in the discussion and bringing back a report to the August meeting.

The August meeting was cancelled and the committee reports were moved to the September meeting.

At the September meeting, since the time line also coincided with the budget time line for the fiscal year starting October 1, the budget was taken up during the regular business meeting. The budget committee presented a proposed budget, which was debated and approved by majority vote of all members present at the meeting and participating by video or phone.

We then moved to the planning portion of the meeting where I stepped in to facilitate. The staffing committee report was presented in writing and offered that the committee had not come to consensus on a report and that the work would need to continue. Some members who served on that committee offered observations on what had been discussed and some of the issues preventing the committee from completing its work.

The committee addressing CFI issues then presented its report. It had been prepared as a proposal by CFI unit members, not as a consensus of a joint planning committee. The report

served as the foundation for discussion around larger issues of how the CFI unit and the rest of the units of the Guild interrelate.

After lengthy discussion, we went back to the two topics and identified next steps for the staffing committee and the CFI issues committee. We identified further data that needed to be collected to clarify issues, and questions that needed further exploration. I clarified that this committee is not the CFI as it is formally constituted. Rather, this committee is a joint committee of the planning process. The committee was charged with discussing the issues raised under this topic and bringing back the discussion and any recommendations to the full planning group.

As is the practice at PMWG, many members of the Guild were present at the September meeting and participated in the discussion and offered ideas for issues to be addressed as next steps in the deliberations of these two planning committees.

At the close of the meeting, I offered a few observations about the process, as an outsider to the organization, and offered to put some of my observations in writing. I believe there was overall consensus that I should do so. I expressed uncertainty as to whether the process could continue as a traditional planning process, and left the decision as to whether or how to continue to the organization. Any further involvement in this process on my part will be determined prior to, or at the October meeting. Each member present was asked to share any closing comments and the meeting ended after all had the opportunity to speak.

Observations introduction

First, it is important to be clear that what follows is not intended to serve as a comprehensive organizational analysis. That would be a much larger undertaking which would require extensive interviews and further meetings. No one should take this document out and present it as if it was a comprehensive analysis. However, I have seen enough in my short exposure to the PMWG to offer some observations.

Conditions necessary to achieving successful strategy

I had proposed several conditions that I believed were essential to any strategic planning process, and particularly this effort within the guild to identify strategic issues to work on. They included these behavioral norms:

       Assume positive intent
       Withhold judgment, seek to understand
       Listen
       Participate
       Be fully present

I elaborated on those in explaining their meaning to the group and the members of the group agreed that these were appropriate norms to guide their work.

Assuming positive intent requires the good faith to assume we are all on the same side, even though we may see things differently. It requires giving the other the benefit of the doubt. *Withholding judgment* closely follows the assumption of positive intent. It is too easy to jump to conclusions about the intent of the other. *Seeking understanding* requires setting aside your snap judgments and making a genuine effort to understand the underlying interests of the other. To truly *listen* is an active task. It is not passive. Listening with intent means paying full attention to the other and not simultaneously formulating your response to what they have said. Listening is hard work.

Participation must be active and genuine. This does not simply mean speaking your piece. Expressing your point of view is not enough. Active participation includes attending to what is going on in the room, and incorporates the prior norms on the list. An active participant first assumes positive intent, withholds judgment, seeks understanding, listens, and then enters the conversation with that backdrop. Biding your time to make a comment is not sufficient for active participation.

Being fully present incorporates all the prior norms and adds the need to be fully in the room and in the moment. This requires that you speak from your own feelings and your own experience. While it may be appropriate in a formal governance role on the Executive Committee that you play a representative function for your constituents; in a planning session under these norms it is not appropriate to bring others into the room and attempt to augment your personal participation by claiming to speak for others. Being fully present is a deeply personal responsibility to the group to be with them in the here and now.
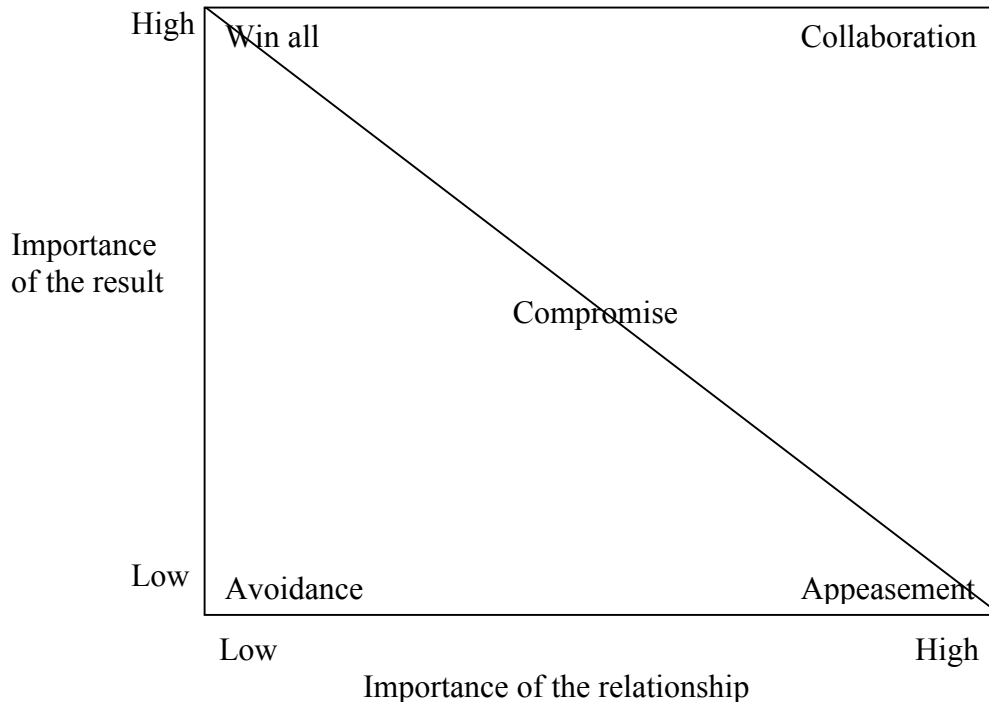
As I came into the September meeting, based on my experience in June, I added some additional key conditions that I believed were essential to developing successful joint strategy.

The first condition is *good will*. The participants must all bring the good will to understand the interests others bring into the room and not insist solely on one's own interests being met. There must be good will to make progress in the direction of increased voice and legitimate issues of governance. This must be done in a manner that:
> *Creates unity* (the second condition), and
> *Maintains a healthy local union* (the third condition)

Conflict resolution matrix

I presented to the group a graphic presentation of a conflict resolution matrix.

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High │ Win all                          Collaboration
     │ ╲
     │  ╲
Importance│╲
of the result│╲
     │      ╲
     │      Compromise
     │            ╲
     │              ╲
     │                ╲
     │                  ╲
Low  │ Avoidance          Appeasement
     └─────────────────────────────────
       Low                         High
          Importance of the relationship
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Each point within this grid is a conflict style. It is not my intent in this paper to detail the concepts of this grid. I described it fully at the September meeting. Each style is an appropriate style in some circumstances. In collective bargaining we are usually struggling to resolve our conflict in the lower left half of the chart. We start out with "win all" proposals designed to stake out a position toward which we hope to move the other. We eventually reach a compromise with which neither side is happy, but with which each can live. The relationship stumbles along toward the next conflict and the next compromise. Where on the line between "appeasement" and "win all" the compromise ends up depends often on the relative power of the parties. If one side has the power to win all the time and insists on doing so, the relationship deteriorates, resentments build, and future compromises become increasingly difficult. The other side looks for the opportunity and prepares for the day they have the power to overcome the other. We have all seen those kinds of unbalanced power relationships in collective bargaining.

Collaboration is the most difficult conflict resolution style. Often referred to as "win-win", this is a style in which each party attempts to truly understand the interests of the other, and the parties work together to build collaborative solutions that meet the underlying needs of each. This is very rare in collective bargaining. It has been reached in some long term relationships built around the principles of interest based bargaining. There are excellent examples of ongoing labor-management committees that seek to collaborate continuously to improve employee work life within a thriving enterprise.

Within the labor movement, since we are all on the same side in the struggle for social and economic justice, collaboration ought to be our gold standard. It has never been easy to achieve but we are stronger to the extent we work collaboratively within each union, between unions, and in achieving partnership with community organizations engaged in the same struggle.

Observations of the Pacific Media Workers Guild

Overview

Again, these are solely my own observations, coming from the frame I described above. From the outside, the PMWG has been an impressive model of creativity in the face of the existential threat caused by the massive shift in the media industry which is the core historical industry in which the Guild was formed. The Guild is considered a leader in building a freelance program to unite journalists and other media workers who were laid off from the big media houses. The Guild was quick to recognize that those independent journalists and media workers were not the enemy. The system that is shaking the ground on which they walk has changed, but the commitment of media workers to their craft has not. The Guild had the foresight to expand its view of its jurisdiction to incorporate freelancers and others involved in non-fiction language arts. This led to bringing the interpreters into the unit and engaging in the fight to achieve collective bargaining rights through legislation to create an employer of record with which to bargain.

From the inside, this relationship between the interpreter unit and the Guild within which they affiliated is strained. The marriage metaphor arose during the discussions. The "marriage" is now over 12 years old. I will come back to that metaphor.
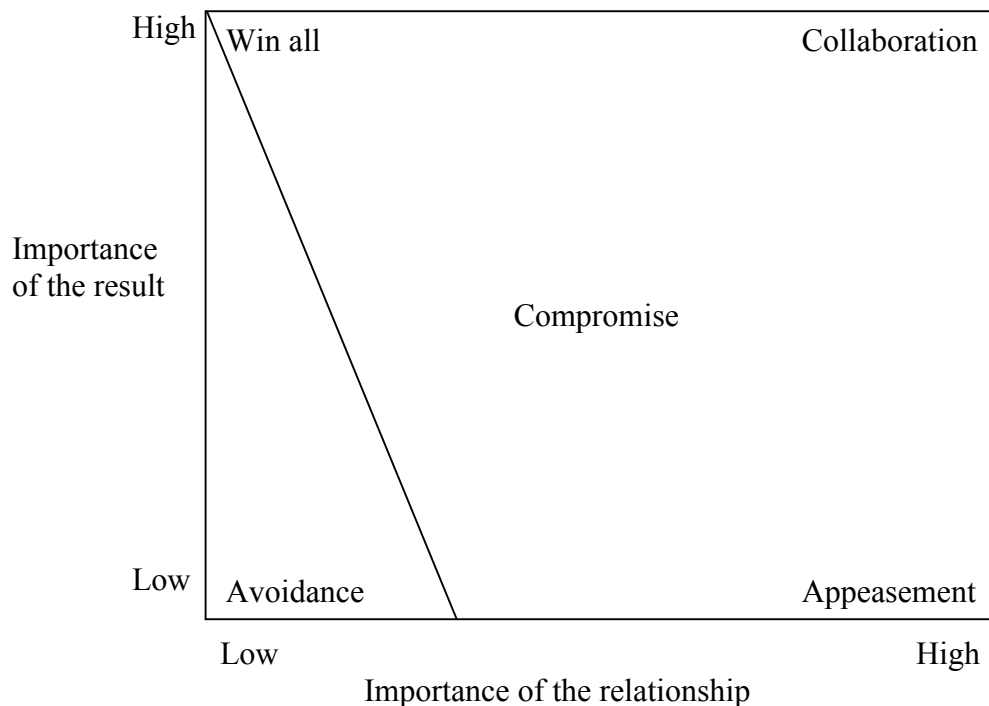
Conflict resolution matrix as it applies to the PMWG

The conflict resolution matrix is a useful tool to analyze the internal tensions within the Guild. Many of the CFI unit members and leaders present expressed profound frustration and dissatisfaction with how their issues are dealt with and how decisions are made within the Guild. Other Guild members and leaders present expressed disappointment with the expressed frustrations and held alternative views about how best the Guild can represent all of its members. Without going into depth on the nature of the issues, or judging who is "right", it is clear that this tension is deep and is dividing the union.

The participants were operating deep within the left half of the matrix. Many of the participants were advocating positions on the "importance of the result" axis, expressing demands at the "win all" level of intensity. This would necessarily demand "appeasement" from the other party on the "importance of the relationship" axis. Other participants were advocating for more of a compromise approach, while resisting appeasement, and asserting alternative solutions on their own "importance of the result" axis. Again, without judging who is "right", the struggle was clearly one where compromise would be difficult to achieve, let alone collaboration. It was clear that there were substantial differences of opinion about what the "result" should be. It was not clear the extent to which parties valued "the importance of the relationship".

Using the matrix, one can see that if all parties are operating as if their preferred results are more important than the continued relationship, the conflict area becomes constricted further to the left of the grid. Imagine moving the point at which the diagonal line strikes the "importance of the relationship" access further to the left of the grid. It becomes clear that compromise becomes increasingly difficult. Compromise requires all parties to see both the result and the continuing relationship as equally important. In the below example, collaboration is an even more distant concept.

Where the importance of the result is valued more than the relationship:

Three alternatives for the future of the PMWG

Looking at the PMWG through the lens of the conflict resolution matrix leads me to the observation that there are 3 alternative paths for the future of the guild.

Alternative 1 is to continue the status quo. Under this alternative the parties struggle continuously through asserting alternative "positions". Every meeting involves division over issues and resolution is through votes and dividing the house. The relative power of the parties determines what motions pass at each meeting. The parties prepare to muster their forces for the same fights to be re-fought at the next opportunity. Compromise remains out of reach and collaboration is unlikely at all.

Alternative 2 is divorce, using the marriage metaphor. The parties mutually conclude that collaboration will not occur, and that even compromise is not likely. The energy behind the

conflict is turned to negotiating the terms of the divorce so that each party can go forward on its own path.

Alternative 3 is to work toward mutually agreeable compromise and eventual collaboration. This requires all the conditions be in place as described in the "Conditions necessary to achieving successful strategy" section previously in this report. This requires that all parties reach the conclusion that the continuation of the relationship is important, and that results cannot be demanded that would jeopardize the long term relationship.

The members of the PMWG, as well as their leadership, must make a choice. I assume that alternative 1 is untenable to all. The status quo will continue to rip the union apart and damage it in ways that it may not recover from. Animosity will build rather than abate, and compromise and collaboration become increasingly difficult to achieve.

If the parties come to the realistic conclusion that the differences cannot be bridged, they should decide to move quickly to alternative 2, initiate divorce proceedings and minimize the period of conflict. This is always hard, as there are always wounds and grievances that each party brings into the proceedings. A divorce must be negotiated in this context. Given the deep seated tensions and lack of trust, this negotiation may require the assistance of a mediator (perhaps from the national union).

If the parties, when faced with alternatives 1 and 2, find this to be an abyss they cannot imagine, then they have to find a way to build sufficient mutual trust to struggle toward alternative 3. This will be hard. There will need to be a period of soul-searching. Rebuilding trust will be a necessary condition. Solutions must build unity and hold the health of the overall union as a mutual goal.

Alternative 3 – necessary conditions

If the parties decide to make a go of this marriage and to recommit to building a unified and healthy organization, I offer some observations on what must occur.

Above all, the parties will need to rebuild trust. This is not easy, given the tensions I observed. People will have to lay down their animosities and be open to learning about each other, and treating each other with care and compassion. This may require the assistance and intervention of a third party skilled in relationship building.

I will start with observations about the norms we had all agreed to.

Assume positive intent. This is huge. Efforts will have to be made to establish trust. There will need to be an underlying assumption that each member of the guild and all of the officers and staff are coming from a place of positive intent to build an even more effective union for all of its members.

Withhold judgment and seek understanding. This follows close on the heels of assumptions of intent. Complaints and grievances appear as judgments and bring out defensiveness. Bridging

this chasm requires a deep effort to truly understand the underlying interests of others. This requires setting aside one's own "positions" and truly trying to understand each other.

Listen. You cannot understand without actively listening. You have to set aside the tendency to begin formulating your rebuttal while the other is talking. Listening is hard work, and is necessary to understanding.

Participate. Participation is not simply making statements. It is moving with the ebb and flow that comes from exploring underlying needs and interests. Constructive participation seeks solutions, not argumentation. This is not the absence of disagreement, but it does require struggling to work through disagreement to solutions that reflect mutual interests.

Be fully present. Being fully present means speaking from your own experience. Presence is a combination of all the above norms. A fully present participant is continually analyzing what is being said, looking for underlying interests, and fully listening. Being fully present means staying in the group, in the time, and not mentally wandering off to outside distractions.

Now to the key conditions that I believe are necessary to go forward:

Good will. Again, this will require working through trust and treating each other as mutual travelers on the same journey.

Create unity. The mutual goal must be a unified organization that brings all of the members together in one struggle for justice. Members must of course be clear on what their own struggles for justice are, and also must be curious about and be committed to the success of other members in their struggle for justice. This is a both/and, not an either/or dichotomy. Creating unity recognizes that there are finite resources which must be managed for the good of all. Mutual sacrifice is part of commitment to each other.

Maintain a healthy local union. The resources of the union come from the dues of members. These are defined and finite. For the local to be healthy and survive, all parties must be involved in making strategic decisions about how resources are applied. There are always more needs than resources. The employer always has more resources to draw from than the union. Maintaining a healthy local requires balancing all of the needs of the union, recognizing they cannot all be met, and prioritizing strategically, not just based on who has the power at the time to pull resources to their needs at the expense of others.

Alternative 3 - Specific observations that will need to be considered in the solution

The CFI unit - Beneath the anger and demands of participating interpreters, there are legitimate underlying interests. They are in the early years of a collective bargaining experience. The legislation created artificial regions rather than a statewide bargaining unit. Though that compromise was the result of the sausage making process of creating legislation, it has made bargaining more complex. It is real that many judges resent the law and are engaging in daily assaults on the integrity of the contract. It has been difficult incorporating interpreters into the

Guild in a way that they feel fully a part of a larger organization, both locally and nationally. The intensity of the struggle creates an understandable internal focus.

The legacy units - At the same time, the legacy media units of the Guild have legitimate underlying interests as they are fighting for their very existence. The media industry is undergoing a massive restructuring. Print media is rarely sought out by generations under the age of 30. Employers are pushing aside the Guild and its members, demanding major concessions and engaging in massive layoffs. Whole newspapers have simply gone out of business. Those members also have difficulty looking up from their struggle for daily survival to see the bigger picture.

Structure and governance - The structure of a local union requires representation on governing bodies that reasonably reflects the diversity of the membership and the types of units within which they work. There is work to be done to modify the current Executive Committee structure so that it is more representative of the membership. This may require expansion and/or redefinition of roles. In a local of any size, and particularly for one as small as PMWG, there should be one unified governance structure with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Once that governance structure is redesigned, all must recognize its central decision making authority. There cannot be multiple centers of decision making authority in a unified local union. To do so would, by definition, create a second local union within the first. In addition to making the structure more fairly representative, the local will need to tighten up its processes. The loose, informal town meeting style may have worked when the membership was more homogenous. With a more diverse membership, there should be clear definitions of what decisions are made by the Executive Committee and which are referred to the membership as a whole. Given the geography, and the fact that members have increasingly complex lives, a "who shows up" model is not one of true democracy and limits participation by the entire membership.

Staffing and staff accountability – In a unified local union, there is a clear line of staff accountability to the overall direction set by the governing body. The chief officer is responsible for assuring that the staff members are assigned in ways that balance the needs of all of the members, recognizing again that there are never enough staff members to meet all the needs. The key to stretching the thin resource of staff to meet the needs of members is a well developed steward and member engagement model. Multiple centers of staff hiring, accountability and supervision would make it nearly impossible to balance the management of this resource. Staff members need to be hired based on their skill in union representation and member organizing. It is helpful to have a balance of staff from within represented bargaining units, as well as staff who come with experience from other organizations. It is the balance of those perspectives that creates the most effective team that complements each other. It is also important to recognize that the skills required of union staff define a unique profession. Cross-training so that staff can fill in for each other is an important way to meet the needs of a diverse membership. The union is too small for sole specialization.

The resources of the union are finite. For a union of just under 2000 members and fee payers spread across multiple states and given the sheer size of California, the number of staff of the PMWG is extraordinary. Most unions can afford no more than having about 1 staff person for every 300 – 800 members, with staff often assigned to 3-6 bargaining units. The lower ratio is

normally present only in geographically compact locals. This fact requires even more attention to assuring clear lines of responsibility so that staff can cover the work and support each other.

Organizing – Organizing cannot wait until the union perfectly represents all its current members. In the face of threats to the existence of the media units, creative organizing of freelancers and alternative non-fiction media workers must proceed. Similarly in the face of threats posed by the use of independent contractors as interpreters by the courts, creative efforts to organize those contractors to fight side by side for justice in pay, benefits and job security must proceed. There are too many examples throughout the labor movement where delay in reaching out to workers used by employers to threaten us has caused the threat to become all too real. Workers are never the enemy. The systems of exploitation are.

Internal organizing is also important. The guild must engage media unit non-members in a unified battle against the overwhelming odds stacked against the union. It is surely a struggle to engage people who have seen their industry collapse, and who may place their blame on the union rather than on the system. A renewed effort to create an organizing culture within those units that reaches out to members and non-members alike to take ownership over the battle for their future is necessary. Of course that takes resources, and that consideration needs to go into the mix of priorities for resource allocation. If successful, however, it is the only way short of organizing more new units or raising the dues that the union can achieve increased revenue. Along with that increased revenue there would be an increasingly engaged and mobilized membership.

There is a parallel need to increase membership within the interpreter units. About 75% of those in represented bargaining units are full members of the union. The rest are fee payers. This lack of engagement weakens the union, reduces the capacity for member mobilization, and plays into the hands of the employer.

It would behoove all members and leaders of the union in all units to embrace a plan to engage all members, non-members and fee payers more actively in their union.

Adherence to budget - As the guild has become more diverse, with multiple struggles and multiple needs, a budget is an essential guide for balancing how the resources are applied to the needs of the members. All must be accountable to the budget. Staff expenses must align with a clear expense policy. Executive Committee members must also hold each other accountable to the budget. Lost time must be anticipated, accounted for, and approved within the budget. If the need is there to amend the budget, those decisions should be made transparently and approved by the Executive Committee. Every officer and Executive Committee member is a statutory fiduciary of the organization, and is individually liable, as well as sharing in the collective liability for exercising that fiscal responsibility. As fiduciaries you must accept the responsibility that for a fixed income budget to be amended, any money added to one area of the budget must be taken from another area of the budget.

Summary and conclusion

The Pacific Media Workers Guild has a proud history. It is objectively a creative and innovative local union that is already stretching its limited resources across multiple states and the entire geography of the huge state of California. The expansion to language workers offers potential synergies around joint benefits. One of the questions I asked in the initial interviews, and repeated at the June meeting, was what ideas people had for a project that the entire Guild could work on that would involve a team effort for mutual benefit for all members. There were a few ideas, including some that were very creative. Getting back to those ideas can lead the way to collaborative efforts that build unity and the health of the local. Nothing builds collaborative teamwork better than working collaboratively on a joint project.

The media lingua idea has been out there, but stalled due to lack of outside funding or grants. The suggestion of organizing new units of language workers, with the involvement of both media and interpreter members working side by side on the campaign was floated.

Another idea for collaboration would engage media members in using their skills to raise the public profile of the important value that interpreters bring to the justice system. This would be coupled with an effort to engage interpreters in using their diverse community membership and connections to create entry points for media workers to more fully engage with, understand and tell the story of diverse communities that are historically underrepresented in positive media coverage. A joint campaign to organize workers in alternative language media would be a natural fit for the guild.

The status quo is unacceptable. There are two choices for the future of the organization.

One choice is divorce. Divorce is difficult, but sometimes necessary. If that is where the parties want (or need) to go, then I suggest you get about it quickly and find the most amicable way to do so.

The other choice is to recommit to building a unified, healthy union. If all agree that divorce is not an acceptable or beneficial option for either group, then everyone needs to take in a deep breath, review the necessary conditions for a collaborative consensus building process, and recommit to the norms. Only if you can bury the mistrust and approach the process with good will and the best interest of the entire membership at the core, can you succeed in developing a powerful strategy going forward. I would go further and challenge you to consider the best interests of the entire labor movement, and beyond to the interests of all working people for justice and dignity.

Best wishes to all who participated. I care deeply that you figure this out.

Paul Krissel