

# Spreading the union's inspiration by air and by internet

By Don McIntosh

When Vancouver SAG-AFTRA officer Harold Phillips set out to create a web site showcasing labor radio shows and podcasts, he had no idea how many he'd find. Working with Chris Garlock, coordinator of the Union Cities Program at the Metro Washington (DC) Labor Council, Phillips set up LaborRadioNetwork.org as a resource for people like him—who believe in the union movement and enjoy listening to podcasts. When Phillips first tried to find labor movement podcasts, podcast platform searches for “labor” turned up programs about pregnancy, and “union” sent him to shows for British soccer fans.

Since LaborRadioNetwork.org launched in March 2020, 59 shows have been added to the directory, either because Phillips and Garlock discovered them or were contacted by them. Of those, about 18 are produced by national or local unions or union federations. A few others are put together by publications, non-profit organizations, or academic institutions. The rest are all-volunteer efforts, including 16 that are produced first and foremost as local radio shows, mostly on listener-supported community radio stations.

None of the labor-focused shows have the reach of nationally syndicated radio programs like Fresh Air or podcasts like



One of the more interesting labor podcasts in the LaborRadioNetwork directory is UComm Live, which bills itself as the “loudest, strongest and most controversial labor show on, in, and around the internet.” Modeled after the Howard Stern show, it shoots for fast and funny, with sound effects and cursing. The program is a project of Ucomm Media Group, a union-focused communications firm based in Long Island, New York. Host Chris Lagrange is a former officer of the Long Island Federation of Labor and the New York Working Families Party. He's joined by “know-it-all” researcher and sidekick Brian Young and other guests, and they share news, commentary, and wise cracks. Content is aimed at a national audience, and the show has more listeners in the Chicago area than in its New York home base. UCommLive started as a paid radio spot in 2015, but two years ago the hosts decided to go online-only at a fraction of the cost. Today it comes out four times a month as a podcast, and is streamed live on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter.

The Joe Rogan Experience, but together, they reach tens of thousands of listeners, maybe hundreds of thousands, nationwide.

With a smartphone in every pocket or purse, podcasts have come to rival radio shows for audience. Unlike terrestrial radio, podcasts can be listened to whenever. Listeners typically download or stream them with an app like Google Play, Stitcher, Spotify, or Soundcloud,

or the Apple Podcast app for iPhone users. [The term “podcast” originated with the Apple iPod.]

“Anybody can set up a podcast,” says Phillips, who serves as board vice president of the Portland SAG-AFTRA chapter. “It’s a real democratizing format.”

But podcasting and radio can sometimes be lonely work, and finding an audience can be a

challenge. That results in a lot of stop and start efforts: The National AFL-CIO’s “State of the Unions” podcast has had no new episode since March 18.

To combat isolation and share ideas, Phillips and Garlock have set up a weekly Zoom call. Every Wednesday, hosts from around the country drop in to coordinate and connect.

Because Phillips wants to boost all the shows, he won’t say

which podcast is the best (except his own national union’s podcast, “The SAG-AFTRA Podcast”—which to be fair is a strong show with good production values.)

But Oregon, it turns out, is a hotbed of union radio shows and podcasts. The oldest is Labor Radio, which airs with a rotating cast of hosts every Monday from 6 to 6:30 p.m. on KBOO-Portland and as a podcast.

In Salem, retired union organizer Bob Rossi hosts the Labor Radio Report with support from the Marion Polk Yamhill Central Labor Chapter and the Oregon Building Trades Council. It airs the fourth Friday of each month at 8:10 a.m. on Willamette Wake Up, a daily news show on Salem’s listener-supported KMUZ, and is available as a podcast.

And in Ashland, retired SEIU Local 503 member Wes Brain hosts the Brain Labor Report on Wednesdays at 9 a.m. on KSKQ.

Two labor podcasts also originate in Oregon. The Oregon AFL-CIO puts on The Voice of Oregon’s Workers. And Oregon’s SEIU Local 503 produces a podcast called Stronger Together that features news and stories from the state’s largest public sector union.

**FIND A LABOR PODCAST**  
LaborRadioNetwork.org



**A HARD DAY'S WORK  
SHOULD EQUAL A HARD  
DAY'S PAY. I WILL ALWAYS  
FIGHT TO EXPAND AND  
STRENGTHEN ORGANIZED  
LABOR IN THIS COUNTRY.  
IT'S HOW WE'RE GOING TO  
REBUILD THE MIDDLE  
CLASS.**

**-Sen. Jeff Merkley**

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