



THE NEWSGUILD – CWA

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December 5, 2020

Newspaper Guild of Pittsburgh Executive Committee:

This memo is to provide you with an accounting of the investigation and events that led to the resignation of Local President Mike Fuoco.

In the latter half of September 25, 2020, I received a call from a former local member (“Person A”) who conveyed to me allegations of misconduct by then-president Fuoco. These allegations were based on her first-hand experience. I provided this information to the CWA Chief of Staff who then conducted a further interview of this individual the following morning, September 26, 2020. On the afternoon of September 26, 2020, I briefed members of the local executive committee on the nature and gravity of the allegations. That evening the committee accepted Fuoco’s resignation as local president. I understand he also retired from employment at the Post-Gazette, all within one day of Person A contacting me with her allegations.

A preliminary investigation into allegations of misconduct by Fuoco had begun prior to the September 25, 2020 contact from Person A, but had produced nothing actionable. In December 2019, Mike Elk, the owner of paydayreport.com, emailed me shortly after I took office as The NewsGuild-CWA president suggesting that Fuoco had engaged in sexual harassment, that he was writing a story about it and that I should launch an investigation. In January 2020, I met with Elk in person in Washington, DC. At this meeting he again alleged that Fuoco had engaged in sexual harassment without providing any actionable specifics. Elk insinuated that he was talking to multiple women and gave me a first name and employer of a woman who presumably would know more.

Because of the sensitive and nonspecific nature of what Elk shared and because he was not forthcoming about the nature of this person’s story or their involvement in these allegations, it did not feel appropriate for me to approach them without more information. When it comes to sexual harassment, we know it’s integral to mitigate harm and treat survivors with dignity and care.

It was my understanding that when Elk first contacted me he did so in his capacity as a labor journalist. I expected he would provide more information and follow up, but he did not for several months, nor did any else contact me or the union to file a complaint or allegation regarding Fuoco.

In June, as tensions rose in the Pittsburgh local over management sidelining Black journalists covering racial justice protests, Elk reached out again saying he was pursuing a story about Fuoco and publicly called for the local to engage in a wildcat strike. He did not provide any more specific information about the sexual harassment allegations.

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At the end of July 2020, Elk contacted me again demanding a TNG investigation into Fuoco. I reiterated that I need the specific allegations. I asked him to provide me with his information in writing, and I asked that he have anyone with information to contact me. He eventually sent me and several others not involved in the investigation a message string between himself and “Person B” from May 2019. The messages alleged sexual harassment in Pittsburgh, but did not name Fuoco. Person B told Elk the conversation was “off the record.” I immediately contacted our lawyers, other union officers and staff about the material in the messages. Within two days of receiving the text string, I found and contacted Person B. Upon learning the nature of my call — to investigate the allegations in the string — Person B said the events in question had happened 12 years ago, and she had no interest in pursuing the matter now. I, and other union leaders, made sure she had support and autonomy in the situation.

In the ensuing weeks, Elk sent me further text strings between himself and various individuals. The text strings often featured second-hand and third-hand commentary from individuals about things they had heard or things they would believe about Fuoco but not providing any further information upon which to follow up. It was not clear whether these people were comfortable being contacted by union officials.

Eventually, a text string featured a woman (“Person C”) who, after Elk explained the nature of his own investigation into Fuoco and his attempt to have Fuoco removed from the local, said that “I ...am one of those women.” Elk entitled this string, “Messages from [first name, last name] on sexual assault by Fuoco.” The messages, however, did not recount a sexual assault against this person. When Person C was found and contacted to see if she would provide further information, she said that she had never met Fuoco and did not want to be involved.

Thus, prior to September 25, all of the information that Elk had provided led to conversations with individuals who did not want to talk or pursue charges against Fuoco (Person B) or had no information to provide (Person C). Person A did not come to me via Elk. She contacted me separately. Her information was credible and actionable and resulted in swift action by the local executive committee. Person B re-engaged and told us about her own allegations, as did another woman (“Person D”), all during the weekend of September 26-27, when Fuoco resigned.

I am grateful for the courage of Person A to speak with me and the Chief of Staff to substantiate the allegations. I am proud of the swift action of the local executive committee when briefed on these allegations. Further investigation would have included an interview with Fuoco about the truth of the allegations, but Fuoco resigned his office and membership before those steps could be taken. That resignation is not the end of the matter, however. More work needs to be done.

The CWA Constitution contains the CWA Policy on Mutual Respect, which calls on all members to fight discrimination, including sexual harassment, whenever and wherever we see it. As union members, we have an affirmative duty to actively oppose racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of prejudice and bigotry. And as journalists we have an ethical duty to minimize harm, treating all human beings as deserving of respect.

To better effectuate this policy and ensure all members feel supported in bringing allegations forward, the local has restarted its Human Rights Committee, run by women from the local. Also, my office and a

mixture of union officers and rank-and-file workers have been building a sexual harassment training for union leaders and members of TNG in coordination with CWA's Department of Human Rights. In the spring we'll launch the training alongside our officer training for all locals in The NewsGuild-CWA. In the wake of the George Floyd killing, the international union has communicated to all local leaders the importance of abiding by and effectuating the Policy on Mutual Respect and has launched other efforts to strengthen our commitment to civil rights at every turn. The Newspaper Guild of Pittsburgh has also shared the reporting process directly with their members.

As union members and journalists we have a duty to support and protect survivors of harassment and assault in our union and in the broader labor movement. An injury to one is an injury to all.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon Schleuss', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jon Schleuss
President, The NewsGuild-CWA