

# NPR Ousts Producer Over ‘Occupy DC’

For years now, U.S. “public broadcasting” has run scared from right-wing attacks and Republican funding cuts. So, NPR and PBS lard on more right-wing pundits, while purging any sign of liberal dissent as just happened with a producer of an opera show who joined “Occupy DC” protests, David Swanson reports.

By David Swanson

National Public Radio on Wednesday discovered that a woman named Lisa Simeone, who produced a show about opera called “World of Opera,” had been participating in a nonviolent occupation of Freedom Plaza in Washington, D.C., organized by [October2011.org](http://October2011.org).

That same day, NPR persuaded a company for which Simeone worked to fire her, cutting her income in half and purging from the so-called public airwaves a voice that had never mentioned politics on NPR.



This frantic email was sent to all NPR staff:

**From:** NPR Communications

**Sent:** Wednesday, October 19, 2011 6:12 PM

**Subject:** From Dana Rehm: Communications Alert

To: All Staff

Fr: Dana Davis Rehm

Re: Communications Alert

We recently learned of *World of Opera* host Lisa Simeone’s participation in an Occupy DC group. *World of Opera* is produced by WDAV, a music and arts station based in Davidson, North Carolina. The program is distributed by NPR. Lisa is not an employee of WDAV or NPR; she is a freelancer with the station.

We’re in conversations with WDAV about how they intend to handle this. We of course take this issue very seriously.

As a reminder, all public comment (including social media) on this matter is being managed by NPR Communications.

All media requests should be routed through NPR Communications at 202.513.2300 or [mediarelations@npr.org](mailto:mediarelations@npr.org). We will keep you updated as needed. Thanks. (NPR also addressed this issue in a [blog post](#).)

About three and a half hours after the above email was sent, Simeone had been fired by a show called "Soundprint" as punishment for having been "unethical." Here is her bio on that show's [website](#). And here she is on [NPR's](#).

"Soundprint" is a show that does touch on politics and includes political viewpoint in Simeone's ledes, but it is not an NPR program and not distributed by NPR. It is, however, heard on public radio stations.

Despite the title "NPR World of Opera," that show is produced by a small station called WDAV for which Simeone contracts. Simeone was not an NPR employee. WDAV has not expressed any concern over Simeone's "ethics."

Simeone told me: "I find it puzzling that NPR objects to my exercising my rights as an American citizen – the right to free speech, the right to peaceable assembly – on my own time in my own life. I'm not an NPR employee. I'm a freelancer. NPR doesn't pay me. I'm also not a news reporter. I don't cover politics. I've never brought a whiff of my political activities into the work I've done for NPR World of Opera. What is NPR afraid I'll do – insert a seditious comment into a synopsis of Madame Butterfly?"

"This sudden concern with my political activities is also surprising in light of the fact that Mara Liasson reports on politics for NPR yet appears as a commentator on FoxTV, Scott Simon hosts an NPR news show yet writes political op-eds for national newspapers, Cokie Roberts reports on politics for NPR yet accepts large speaking fees from businesses. Does NPR also send out 'Communications Alerts' about their activities?"

Let's be clear about Simeone's political activities. We have three quarters of the country wanting billionaires taxed, two-thirds wanting wars ended, large majorities wanting funding moved from the military to green energy and education and jobs.

Simeone has been taking part in a nonviolent encampment designed to facilitate the petitioning of our government for a redress of grievances, a right guaranteed by the First Amendment. That's all. She has been participating. Nothing more.

There is nothing more specific to the allegation, nothing in particular that she has allegedly done other than participate in a nonviolent mass mobilization on behalf of majority opinion.

It may be difficult for NPR bigwigs to understand why we don't all just rent \$400 per night hotel rooms instead of littering a public square with tents. But NPR's highly paid political agitators on behalf of the 1 percent are part of the problem. They are what we are protesting. And that is presumably what makes our speech and assembly "unethical."

Or perhaps the breach of ethics is to be found in behaving as a decent citizen while simultaneously possessing some connection to the most insidious corporate loudspeaker in the country, one labeled "public" but belonging to the 1 percent.

Typical of the comments from NPR listeners in response to NPR's [blog post](#) was one from a Mark Maguire who wrote: "If NPR is exerting pressure on the contracting company to get rid of Lisa, this is terrible. NPR will be sacrificing its integrity."

"You are reminded that non-violent civil disobedience was necessary for blacks in the USA, citizens in the Philippines under Marcos, and for India under the British."

The most important point to stress here, I think, is that all requests should be routed through NPR Communications at 202-513-2300 or [mediarelations@npr.org](mailto:mediarelations@npr.org)

**David Swanson is the author of "War Is A Lie." (This article first appeared at [warisacrime.org](http://warisacrime.org) .)**

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