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Contract Update—February 22, 2010

Does This Sound Fair To You?

The Social Security Administration is famous for disciplining members of the bargaining unit for the smallest perceived infraction while management officials who commit much more serious offenses are given award money and promotions.

It's certainly not fair, but now, SSA wants to make drastic changes in the way it handles disciplinary actions. Those proposals – which were made recently during contract negotiations with AFGE – would give the agency more power and make the average employee's working life even more precarious.

Here are a few examples of what SSA wants to do:

- Change those portions of the contract dealing with progressive discipline.

  Right now the punishment has to equal the offense, but if the agency gets its way, local managers would be able to impose any kind of discipline they want. Imagine being two minutes late returning from lunch and being hit with a five-day suspension because your manager doesn't like you or they're an overbearing control freak. Yes, it could happen!

- Eliminate notices to the Union when the agency proposes to discipline employees.

  Most people wouldn't know what to do with that kind of letter and if the Union isn't aware of the action, the employee's career could suffer a tremendous setback.

- Restrict who the Union can assign to represent employees.

  The agency doesn't want attorneys being assigned to grievances, even though many of them have won substantial awards and judgments for employees.

- Have the ability to delegate grievance hearings and decisions to anyone it wants. In other words, the management official who's named in the grievance could hear the employee's presentation and then make a decision. Does the agency really think that's fair?

"Employees have to remember that every proposal the agency makes is meant to benefit management – *not* the bargaining unit," said Witold Skwierczynski, the Union's Chief Negotiator. "SSA's bargaining team wants to do everything it can to disadvantage employees."

Social Security's Chief Negotiator is Ken Powell, and he has been receiving comments from the bargaining unit since contract talks began earlier this year. To send him remarks or suggestions, use this email address:

Ken.Powell@ssa.gov.