

Contract Update – June 14, 2010

Contract negotiations between AFGE and the Social Security Administration will resume this week, but when they ended on May 20, many observers were surprised by the actions of one agency official.

The two sides were discussing Article 27 of the National Agreement, which concerns details (the temporary assignment of employees to a different position or location). As those talks progressed, management's de facto chief negotiator – Ralph Patinella – suddenly jumped out of his seat and began pointing and yelling at his Union counterpart, Witold Skwierczynski.

“It was white, hot anger,” said Dana Duggins, who is also on AFGE's bargaining team. “It was a little scary. I have never seen Ralph lose his temper like that before.”

After Patinella was able to compose himself, negotiations resumed.

As part of Article 27, the Union is proposing that with details of less than 30 days, volunteers be solicited and the employee with the most seniority be chosen. If no one volunteers for the job, the agency could pick from its pool of eligible candidates.

SSA's bargaining team seemed to reject that idea and Union officials believe Patinella is trying to push Commissioner Michael Astrue's policy of generally hiring and promoting younger employees, instead of more experienced staff.

Both sides also discussed Article 10 of the AFGE/SSA contract today, which deals with hours of work. The Union believes field office and teleservice center employees should be able to work credit hours *before* their usual shift begins (for example, they could arrive at 7 a.m. and earn credit hours, even though they're not scheduled to start until 8 o'clock).

That policy is now in effect for many other SSA components, and the Union wants it expanded to FOs and TSCs.

Duggins said agency negotiators asked a number of questions about the proposed change, wondering how it would affect workloads in both locations.

“They gave us absolutely absurd scenarios,” she said. “Things that would never happen!”

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