

Arbitrator Orders Reinstatement

On November 19, 2011, Federal Arbitrator Suzanne Butler issued her decision and award regarding AFGE Local 1812's grievance over the Broadcasting Board of Governors' reduction-in-force at the Office of Cuba Broadcasting.

The Union argued that the RIF was not based on "lack of funds" or "lack of work". It was instead generated by former OCB Director Pedro Roig who used the RIF to remove employees he did not like.

AFGE Local 1812 grieved the Agency's refusal to bargain the impact of the RIF and its failure to honor certain requirements of the Negotiated Labor-Management Agreement.

Arbitrator Butler found the Union's grievance "meritorious in its entirety" and ordered a *status quo ante* remedy. She also found that "the Agency's conduct in this matter was egregiously willful throughout" and "that this was an improperly motivated RIF from the beginning".

The Arbitrator's award orders, among other things, reinstatement of the affected employees to their previous positions without loss of seniority or benefits and full back pay including interest.

Hiring of Non-U.S. Citizens Update

The Agency has been routinely hiring non-U.S. citizens for over 20 years despite the presence of suitably qualified U.S. citizens. In June 2006, the Union filed a grievance and Arbitrator George E. Marshall, Jr. ruled in the Union's favor, finding that the Agency had been violating the Union Contract and the Smith/Mundt Act by requiring U.S. citizens to be "equally or better qualified" for the purposes of employment. In 2008 the Agency filed exceptions to the Arbitrator's decision with the FLRA but those exceptions were dismissed as being interlocutory. The parties were instructed by the arbitrator to negotiate a remedy to the grievance.

As of August 2008, the parties could not agree on a remedy. Actually, the Agency simply rejected all Union proposals.

The Union contacted the Arbitrator for a resolution and he ruled on the remedy giving the Union almost every thing it had asked for. The Agency then filed a new set of exceptions with the FLRA. On November 25th, 2011, the FLRA dismissed this set of the Agency's exceptions.

While the Agency should now compensate U.S. citizen employees it failed to select, the Agency told AFGE Local 1812, even before the FLRA ruling, that it would simply sit on the decision if it was not favorable to the Agency, forcing the Union to file an Unfair Labor Practice claim (ULP).

We hope that the Agency will have a change of mind and realize that by having the Union file a ULP, it would merely be postponing the inevitable and sticking, yet again, the U.S. taxpayers with the bill for its illegal activities. It never ceases to amaze us on how U.S. taxpayer money has been used by this Agency to try to establish itself as being above the law.

BBG Consultant Says "Not Feasible" for Now

According to the report from Delloitte (the consultant the BBG hired to look at the BBG's organization): "It is unclear whether de-federalizing VOA is actually feasible or even desirable" and "[I]f VOA constitutes communications essential to national security, privatization may not be feasible."

According to findings in the report, it is the senior leadership of the grantees (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, and the Middle East Broadcasting Network) that is pushing the idea of overlap between the grantees and VOA.

It seems that Delloitte never examined whether the claimed overlap was a reality or not but just took the issue as a given.

It appears that the grantees strategy ever since the dismantling of the USIA has been to convince the BBG to cut the VOA language services instead of their own based on the concept that the grantees and the VOA have the same mission. The report talks about a "quick hit" opportunity of integrating some VOA/OCB operations into the grantee structure without de-federalization. What these operations are was not identified.

Chinese Service Celebrates Seventy

On December 6th the VOA Chinese Service celebrated its 70th year of broadcasting. The event was held in the Gold Room of the Rayburn House Office Building. It was hosted by Representative Dana Rohrabacher who also addressed the attendees extolling the accomplishments of the Service and the need for the Service to continue. Also, stopping by were the Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the Honorable Chris Smith, the Honorable David Rivera, the Honorable Don Young, and former Broadcasting Board of Governors member Blanquita Cullum who stressed the importance of the shortwave radio and satellite TV broadcasts to China.

Taking part in the celebration were numerous radio and television broadcasters whom the Broadcasting Board of Governors attempted to throw out of work. The Board had wanted to end the radio and television broadcasts as part of their 2012 budget proposal. Congress stepped in to prevent that from happening.

The Chinese Service began broadcasting 70 years ago this month.

Broadcasting Board Governor Victor Ashe visits Greenville

Broadcasting Board of Governors member, Victor Ashe, toured the Voice of America Transmitting Station Site B in Greenville, North Carolina on December 7th.

His visit was a morale boosting event for Greenville. Governor Ashe stated that he appreciated the hard work and dedication of the technicians and staff in keeping the aging transmitters operational and on the air. Governor Ashe said that he believes that we must keep a station open in the continental United States and that Greenville does vital work.

He also strongly suggested that Greenville stop using the station identification of Greenville VOA Site B and use the officially dedicated name. Greenville's official name is the Edward R. Murrow Transmitting Station. Mr. Murrow, a well known broadcast journalist, was a North Carolina native born near the city of Greensboro. The Edward R. Murrow Transmitting Station was officially dedicated by President John F. Kennedy in February 1962. The technicians and staff of the Edward R. Murrow Transmitting Station enjoyed the openness and honesty of Mr. Ashe's questions and answers. He is the first member of the currently seated Broadcasting Board of Governors to visit and tour the station. To the employees of the transmitting station his visit was almost like Santa Claus arriving early with his words of appreciation and honesty.

Language Services Writing Their Own News: Not A Good Idea

Many of our members at AFGE Local 1812 are from VOA language services. Many have long careers behind them, a lot of experience, and they are telling us that they have great reservations about the Agency's plan to have individual language services write much more of their own news.

What is also interesting is that we have been approached by some language service Chiefs who have expressed similar concerns about these plans. The concerns are as follows:

1. Language services are already burdened by many new missions: TV, Internet, Facebook, SMS, even as their staff have been reduced. Who is going to have time to write these news stories?
2. Already, we are aware of language services where, for lack of time, editing is perfunctory. News stories are opened, sometimes glanced at, and printed. That's not editing. but no one is available to do real editing. Who will do the real editing and the checking of facts.
3. The Agency is offering training to language services for news writing. But from a practical point of view, only managers have access to the wire services with the latest information. Who is going to provide staffers with adequate sources when managers are not present, such as on the night shift or weekends, or when the supervisor is on Annual Leave or Sick Leave.
4. Many language services operate with skeleton crews on night shift or weekends. We know of many shifts covered by single staffers. When they are tired, stressed, on deadline, etc., they have been known to make mistakes, and these happen more often than management is aware of. It's bad enough when translation mistakes are made, but what will happen when factual mistakes are made, as has already happened in some services doing original material?
5. Professional news writers from the main English-language newsroom are used to putting out standard news, regardless of their national origin, cultural preferences, religious beliefs. These news items are uniformly translated throughout the Agency and give it a uniform voice. What will happen when over a dozen language services write over a dozen different versions of the same news item? Will the VOA, which is identified abroad with the U.S. government, speak with numerous different voices?

The Agency has been very good about dismissing concerns and simply charging ahead with its plans. We regret that attitude, because it seeks to shift most burdens to employees. Management pretends that everything is fine. Employees have to pretend they can do everything, even when they can't. And when they can't, management turns on them when in fact,

employees feel cornered. It's the type of bad faith situation that breeds contempt within the ranks. The knowledge that you're being set up to fail, and will have to pay, regardless.

VOA Ends Croatian Broadcasts

VOA's Croatian Service signed off recently, after 19 years of broadcast that began after the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. We at AFGE Local 1812 were thrilled that no RIFs (Reduction in Force or layoffs) took place, and that there were attempts by the Agency to place even all the contractors.

At a time of 9 percent unemployment nationwide, these efforts are much appreciated. Any time VOA employees who are no longer needed in a section can be used in another, it can be a win-win situation both for Labor and Management.

Employees stay employed, the Agency keeps experienced employees who might require less training, are already in the area, and have shown themselves to be reliable. We salute this effort on the part of the Agency.

Labor-Management Forum

It's been almost two years since President Barack Obama ordered the creation of the labor-management forums to "improve the productivity and effectiveness of the Federal Government." This mandate will terminate at the end of the year, unless the order is extended by the President. Even if President Obama does not extend the order, we suggest that the Agency continue these meetings.

At the Agency, this non-confrontational approach to problem-solving got a bit of a late and rocky start, but has produced some positive results, including the re-instatement of a much-needed Ombudsman position.

On Capitol Hill, some legislators have criticized these forums as a dangerous precedent, denouncing them as bad government and pandering to special interests -- that is, Unions.

Yet, we at AFGE Local 1812 have seen little evidence that these forums wielded any real decision-making power for the Union. Instead there have been forums where the Unions have been able to offer suggestions, recommendations and communication. The forums have not decided policy and on the contrary, they have been used by management to make clear to the Local representatives that decisions were being made without their input.

While we recognize that it is management's responsibility or authority to manage the workplace, these forums offer a chance for employees, managers, and Agency officials to discuss government operations so as to improve the services provided by the Agency and its employees. We continue to

hope that the forums can develop into something more than what it currently is.

The Local strongly suggests that these meetings continue.

Good News on the Ombuds Front

One of the (regrettably few) concrete, permanent, and positive results so far of the ongoing Union/Management "forums" — in which top representatives of the VOA unions and senior Management sit around a table and frankly discuss matters of significance to all employees — has been the rekindling of the Ombudsman position, ultimately leading to its permanent return.

At the Unions' strong and repeated recommendation, the Agency agreed to a 6-month trial period, after which a decision would be made as to the merits of reviving the position. After a round of interviews, a committee composed of two Union reps and two senior Managers recommended Noreen Kinnavy, a skilled and vivacious veteran of many postings across the agency, for the temporary detail, and she was appointed.

After closer to nine months than six as Ombudsman — or Ombudsperson, as some prefer to call it — Noreen presented a report on her work. And a variety of entities, including all three unions, weighed in on her effectiveness.

She received exceptional marks from all who had worked with her, and the Ombudsman position was made permanent after a hiatus of many years.

This is a signal achievement for Noreen, of course, but also for the forces of change for the better in the Agency. Not only has she helpfully counseled employees at all levels — managers as well as rank-and-file employees. She has also brought us insights from ombuds organizations and other (better-performing) government agencies.

Noreen has steadfastly upheld individuals' confidentiality, spoken up vigorously for all employees' interests in task forces and staff meetings, and been an engaging Agency ambassador outside the Agency. And to her considerable credit, she has earned the confidence of both Unions and Management.

She has also taken a strong suggestion of the interview committee to heart, that in addition to working to help employees resolve personal imbroglios and avert some potential disciplinary actions before they reach a level of serious consequences, she also has spoken out forthrightly about wider climate issues that have plagued the Agency.

And we're not talking about thermostat temperatures.

We congratulate Noreen Kinnavy and believe her to be a sensitive, fair-minded, and impartial resource for individuals at all levels, and for the Agency as a whole.

The shopworn phrase “My door is always open” cannot always apply to our new Ombudsman, who of necessity must meet privately with those who seek her counsel. But she has proven to be an important conduit for ideas that, over time, could lead to improved morale throughout the building.

Even if you don’t have a workplace problem to discuss, please take the time to meet her and offer broader ideas to improve the VOA culture.

Noreen’s office in Room 4447 is located in a quiet and inconspicuous corridor on the 4th floor. Her phone number is 203-4970.

BBG’s Continued Poor Showing

The Partnership for Public Service recently released their ratings of Federal Government Agencies. The Partnership for Public Service uses its own formula to rank Federal Agencies, based on the data from the OPM Employee Viewpoint Survey.

Although the overall responses on the OPM Survey placed the BBG in last place, the Partnership for Public Service rated the BBG as 32 out of 35 for small Agencies – not good but not dead last.

The OPM survey and the Partnership for Public Service results both indicate a slight improvement. It is true that Agency management has made some efforts at improving their showing but those efforts have not been attempts to get at the real problems (the constant threat of elimination of language services, the slashing of radio broadcasts, the resulting RIFs, the heavy handed disciplinary actions, and the failure to practice democratic ideals by Agency management).

A November 15, 2011 press release from the BBG gives a clue as to one of those problems, the antipathy the BBG has for radio.

In the press release the BBG announced record audience numbers. But the inconvenient truth for the BBG is that radio remains the largest segment of their audience. This despite the fact that the BBG has been slashing radio broadcasts over a decade and seems intent on ending its shortwave radio broadcasting.

The BBG claimed an audience of 187 million people. However, in the press release the BBG broke down the audience as follows:

106 million radio
97 million television
10 million Internet

Those numbers add up to 213 million not 187 million. It is this type of data that has made Congress skeptical of the BBG and its research. There was no explanation for the discrepancy in the press release.

Some Suggestions

WHY EMPLOYEES DON'T DO WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO DO

Managers often wonder why Agency employees don’t do what they are told to do. And then get really upset with said employees.

We've seen enough cases in the AFGE Local 1812 office to offer a few suggestions. First, let us encourage members to really focus on what their managers are telling them. And telling them, and telling them.

But managers need to shoulder part of the responsibility when things don't work out. Employees often fail because of inconsistencies in management systems.

DISPARATE TREATMENT

Disparate treatment of employees kills morale. We're not talking here of managers assigning employees to do what they do best. We're talking about managers reducing duties of employees they don't care for or favoring certain employees in work assignments. Work units are supposed to be a team. You can't be a team unless your manager believes in it and acts accordingly.

ARE YOU SURE YOU TOLD THEM WHAT TO DO?

Managers play a key role in helping employees know what they are supposed to do: they set goals. And yet, year after year, we find out that Agency managers can't be bothered to set goals at the beginning of the rating year, or wait for the end of the rating year to proceed with mid-year performance reviews.

We know of some managers who operate with their team on a "need to know" basis. Meaning, some team members know where the unit is going, others don't. If you don't involve all your team members in your plan, you really don't have a team. You have individuals not necessarily concerned about what others are doing. We also know of managers unable to delegate. If employees are not put in charge, they have no stake in the outcome.

Training plays a huge role in employees knowing what they are supposed to do. They need the skills and tools essential for them to succeed in their jobs. Yet we hear from employees that training is offered to some, and not others. Or we hear that some employees can always make time for training, and that others get the message they shouldn't really neglect their overwhelming workload to "train".

Finally, we would suggest that whenever employees don't do what they are expected to do, the issue be communicated to them as early as possible, and not allowed to fester. When things fester, the issue ends up in the AFGE Local 1812 office, and at that point, conflict is often unavoidable.

Courtesy Please

A few weeks ago a member of the cleaning crew came into the Union Office to complain about the conditions in the bathrooms in this building. Since we don't contract with them and we don't have the ability to discipline employees, we can only assume she needed to vent her frustration and maybe she thought we could get the word out to our fellow employees.

We listened to her complaints and now we want to get the word out.

We have all witnessed the messes that are left in the bathrooms. We have seen newspapers, soda bottles and other things left in the stalls. We're talking about all the paper on the floor, in the sinks, the clogged toilets, the stopped up drains. We wouldn't tolerate it in our own homes where we would be responsible for cleaning up the messes ourselves. Let's clean up after ourselves here too.

The people on the cleaning crew work hard. If you think by leaving these kinds of messes you are somehow "getting back" at Agency management, think again. It just makes for a bad day for the cleaning crew. Let's face it, they do a job most of us would not think of doing. Do we really want to make their job harder?

The next time you drop a paper towel on the floor – pick it up and put it in the trashcan – not the sink or the toilet. Throw trash in the trashcans. Don't just leave it on the floor. If you make a mess, try to clean it up yourself.

We don't mean to scold you here but these people are fellow workers. Let's treat them with respect.

AFGE Local 1812 Fights Famine

Members of AFGE Local 1812 generously heeded our call to help in the fight against the famine in Somalia. The AFGE Local 1812 Executive Board asked members to donate and the Local would match any amount raised up to \$250.

The members came through with \$380 in donations and the Local provided \$250 in matching funds.

We made a \$630 donation to the International Committee of the Red Cross in the name of AFGE Local 1812. Thank you to all who donated.

Follow-Up On The Web

VOA employees have lots of questions about what's happening in the Agency. For alternatives to the official BBG web site, we can refer you to the AFGE Local 1812 web site (afge1812.org), and to Internet sites that follow the activities of the BBG and the Voice of America

and offer alternative points of view. The more informed we are, the better off we are. A few suggestions:

www.afge1812.org

<http://www.heritage.org/about/staff/d/helle-dale>

<http://www.usgbroadcasts.com/bbgwatch/>

<http://tedlipien.com/blog/>

AFGE Local 1812 offers its News & Views as a corrective to the abuse of power by BBG, IBB, and VOA management.

AFGE Local 1812 welcomes responsible articles from any employee. Anonymous articles allow employees to freely express their views without fear of reprisal from management.

We reserve the right to edit all materials submitted but strive to preserve the voice of the author.

The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the AFGE Local 1812 Executive Committee.

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