

Hoosier Happenings



The Flags of Honor and Flags of Heroes in The NYC 9/11 Memorial Field

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LOOK FOR THE UNION LABEL

Way back in the mid 1970's when there was no internet, cellphones or home computers, television was our window to the information world. I don't know why but I can remember a commercial where ladies were happily singing about looking for the "union label." I recently looked up this rather catchy song by surfing the Internet. Unbelievably I found it under "unionsong.com". Here are those lyrics:

Look for the union label

*When you are buying that coat, dress or blouse.
Remember somewhere our union's sewing,
Our wages going to feed the kids, and run the house.
We work hard, but who's complaining?
So always look for the union label,
It says we're able to make it in the USA!*

(A song for the Union of Needle trades, Industrial, and Textile Employees formerly the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union and other unions. You can view over 800 union songs on this website. I also enjoyed "A Union Man", "Come and Join the Union", and "The Wal-Mart Waltz.")



"Well," I thought. "I'm going to look for that union label on my coat, dress or blouse." The scavenger hunt was on! I began carefully checking the labels on my blouses. I was shocked, stunned and dismayed. My clothing labels turned out to be a real geography lesson. Exotic and exciting locales such as Indonesia, Macau, Jordan, Honduras, Guatemala, Vietnam, Philippines, Sri Lanka, China and Hong Kong loomed out of my shirt collars. I then had a flash of insight or maybe it was a hot flash. Could it be that my clothing labels were the problem? Nope. My teenage son's closet yielded the same faraway places too. Even his school mascot shirt was made in Haiti. How about something as American as apple pie? Jeans! Of course! Blue jeans had to be made in the USA! Wrong again! His blue jeans were made in Mexico. I had high hopes when my search for the elusive union label began in my daughter's cavern of clothing. But alas! No such luck. Her school dress code polo shirts according to the labels sailed in from Vietnam, Pakistan and Cambodia. Her jeans, flip flops, sneakers, and high heels were crafted in China. At this point you might be asking yourself does this woman shop at exclusive high end boutiques or what? Well, if you consider Target, Kohl's, Sears and Kmart expensive stores, then yes I do.

What a gut check! The real evidence of the outsourcing of manufacturing jobs and competing in a global economy lives in our closets, cabinets, refrigerators and garages. Is there really anything we can do as union activists? Should we "do" anything at all? The answer must be yes! Should we stop buying things made in other countries? No. That isn't practical in our world. However, we can take some positive steps by looking for and buying goods that are made in the USA and have that wonderful union label. We can support those companies and industries who invest

in American manufacturing and American workers. But we should not forget our brother and sister workers overseas either who are at times literally dying to make the shirts on our backs. In the spring of this year, there was a horrifying collapse of a garment factory building in Bangladesh. The death toll from the collapse was over 500 garment workers. In the newspaper article describing this terrible tragedy, it stated that this was likely the worst garment factory accident ever, even surpassing the long ago garment industry disaster of 1911 at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York where a fire broke out killing 146 workers. In 2011 and 2012, 260 workers in Pakistan and 112 in Bangladesh were also killed in garment factory fires. There is such a monstrous parallel in these awful events. These more recent overseas tragedies seem to act as a gruesome window to our own past before Unions organized workers to stand up for safe working conditions and decent wages.

Just recently, there was a commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington. I didn't really understand that the famous march and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's famous speech were initiated by the labor Unions. Some of the signs and banners that the marchers held read "Jobs and Freedom". The crucial importance of economic justice and labor rights was not lost on those leaders who spoke that day. Dr. King continued until his death to speak out about "American corporations profiteering on the misery of workers." Dr. King was assassinated in 1968 while intervening in the Memphis Sanitation Workers fight. I found another great quote from Dr. King that still resonates today. "When machines and computers, profit and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered. A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."

As Union Activists, we must continue our fight for worker rights. Unions may be the last defense against the gradual disappearance of what is now viewed as standard working conditions such as the 40 hour work week, paid vacations, weekends off, child labor and workplace safety rules. These important rights were brought about by collective bargaining and not by employer generosity. We are beginning to see the seeds of discontent growing strong. The brave workers in the fast food industry and giant retail stores are taking up the banner for decent wages and the right to unionize. They are truly inspiring. Support the strength and dignity of workers and continue to look for that union label!

Victoria Ours Local AFGE Rep

AFGE Local 3571 Representative Training 2013

by Cindy Bantista

New contract training and health and safety issues were some of the topics of the Local 3571 Representative Training held August 20-22 in Indianapolis. Office representatives from the entire local gathered to discuss and learn new additions to the contract and how to address any health or safety concerns within our offices.

Special guest speaker Rick Hanna from Council 220's Health and Safety Committee discussed specific issues within field offices and the appropriate actions a representative should take to ensure the safety of the public and employees. Rick discussed air quality, ergonomics, reasonable accommodations, shelter in place, asbestos, office temperatures and many other health related topics.

Another guest speaker was Melvin Smith, National Representative from our AFGE Sixth District office. Melvin brings a wealth of knowledge with his 30+ years of experience in handling union issues, resolving grievances, arbitrations and fighting for AFGE members all across our country. Melvin shared many issues and experiences he has dealt with and their relevance to our field offices and TSC. Melvin is an invaluable resource to our local and is available to assist our board, representatives and members on any labor related issue. While representative training allows individual stewards the opportunity to learn new information and procedures, it also provides the ability for our local representatives to come together as one cohesive unit, to network and bond as one strong local in SOLIDARITY. Ask your local representative what new information they acquired at this training --- they should be well-equipped to tackle whatever issues arise in your office.

Greetings,

My name is Cassandra Raine, and I am your new **Benefits Coordinator** for AFGE Local 3571. I am a T16 CR in Evansville, IN (DO 457). I got the wonderful opportunity to meet a few at our Union Training last month and I'm looking forward to getting an opportunity to communicate with those I have not had the chance to meet in further events. Please feel free to contact me anytime regarding union benefits. If I don't have the answer to your question, I will definitely get back with you after I research the information.

AFGE has a variety of benefits/discounts that we offer, ranging from cell phone discounts, amusement parks, free legal advice, etc. Look on the website for great savings.

www.unionplus.org

If you have any questions regarding any discounts/benefits, please feel free to contact me at the information provided below. Also, if there is something you would like to see offered, please feel free to send me your suggestions.

In solidarity,

Cassandra Raine (cassandra.raine@ssa.gov)

AFGE Benefits Coordinator

1-877-800-7585 x25736

*My name is **Kathy O'Neil**, and I'm very excited to be the Women's and Fair Practice Coordinator for AFGE Local 3571! Currently I am a Service Representative in the Fort Wayne field office and have recently worked for the U.S. Department of Labor/Wage and Hour Division in Seattle, Washington. Prior to working for the Federal Government, I worked in the private sector for a Medical Malpractice Insurance Company and a Marketing and Advertising agency. I am proud to say I'm a Boilermaker from Purdue University. I am also a single parent with two high school daughters, and I'm very involved with their high school's Marching Band.*

I am excited about all the opportunities that are available thru the Union and the Women's and Fair Practice Coordinator position. My vision for the position is to be available thru the EEO process, to offer advice, guidance and support. I also want to implement programs that can make our work environment better for all bargaining unit employees. If you or a co-worker are not a member of our Union, I would encourage you to join today. We are so lucky to work in an agency that has such positive support thru our Union. And, if there's something we don't like in our work environment, we CAN make a difference!

Following this newsletter, we will be emailing a survey. Please take the time to complete and fax back or e-mail to my attention. I would very much like to implement programs that all BU employee's will find to have a positive effect on our daily work environment.

I can be reached at Kathryn.ONeil@ssa.gov or by phone at 877-223-6067, ext. 28821. I will do my best to get back with you within 24 hours.

The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.

Mohandas Gandhi

Getting an idea should be like sitting down on a pin. It should make you jump up and do something.

E.L. Simpson

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American Federation of
Government
Employees

QUOTES:

**You can kill a man, but
you can't kill an idea.**

Medgar Evers

**Success is getting what
you want. Happiness is
wanting what you get.**

Ibo Proverb



September 2013 News Brief:

When a member of the public walks into a Social Security office today, he or she would have a different perception from a year or two ago when the agency started a hiring freeze due to budget cuts. We expect the stress on our offices and the public to worsen as we continue to lose members of our staff and technical knowledge.

What can we do to help?

Here are a few numbers to call:

AFGE Hotline: 1-888-775-3148.

Pay Freeze: 1-888-907-8362.

The White House Comment Line: 1-202-456-1111.

Thank you for all that you do.

In Solidarity,

Georgiann Drake

AFGE Local 3571

First Vice President

Union and Management- A Brighter Future

Unions have achieved many successes in the 20th century. However, in spite of the successes, a negative byproduct has been the ongoing rift between Union and management. In fact, this devolving relationship has become quite normal. In other words, the rift is so common and understood, that it's not really questioned..., it's just accepted: Union and management are at constant odds with each other.

As much as I'd love for all of us to be holding hands underneath rainbows, surrounded by bright flowers, unicorns, and mermaids playing harps, the fact is that I'm a realist, and thus fully understand that things aren't going to be even remotely perfect. But I'm also a pragmatist, and as a practical matter, I know that Union, management relations do not even remotely necessitate and/or warrant such a devolving relationship in order for us to get our work done at Social Security.

There is plenty of blame to go around. So what do we do? My contention is that you either accept the status quo or become an agent of change. I have chosen the latter. Regardless of the reasons for this devolving relationship, I know that at bottom, there is a job to do and we need to do it. The tenor of my overall interactions with management has been commensurate, congenial, and professional. Local President, Bill Price and I have gone above and beyond in trying to avoid formal charges in light of management's contractual violations, because we want to garner relationships and contribute solutions to problems. Too often, however, management has responded poorly, and thus conflated our positive efforts with defensiveness, contemptuousness, and exaggeration. I personally think that this is a result of misperceptions generated from the devolving relationship between Union and management that has gone on for years. But for the 21st century, this is simply unnecessary. We can do much better, but the effort to achieve this must be equal, and so too must be our acknowledgement and recognition of one another. Too often it seems that management views the Union as an obstacle, one with which they begrudgingly have to tolerate. It shouldn't be like this. Management should embrace the Union as an equal, as an ally in achieving results towards serving the public and maintaining a good workforce. President Kennedy didn't sign our compact into law so that we could be in a perpetual cycle of conflict. Rather, he did it, in part to ensure a basic and fundamental American value of checks and balances. To that end, respectful and trustworthy rapport and relationships must be mutually pursued.

I said it earlier that things will not be perfect, and they won't. It's inevitable..., there are going to be times where formal charges are made, arbitrations scheduled, EEOs, and Unfair Labor Practices filed. But there is too high a percentage of these instances that can and should be avoided if there was less cynicism, less misperception, and replaced by more trust, positive rapport, and relationships. An obstacle to this is Union personnel and managers who want to be the boss, and thus want to use all the time and resources proving that they are. I say enough is enough with all the unnecessary struggles. I think there are more of us out here who want to be a part of the positive change I'm suggesting, and we should be the ones setting the tone for SSA in the 21st century. This is what I'll be doing - I hope you'll join me.

Amad Ali

Executive Vice President

AFGE Local 3571

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NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION FIELD OPERATIONS LOCALS

AFGE, AFL-CIO

Representing 30,000 Social Security Administration employees working in over 1,200 field installations and 33 teleservice centers across the nation, Puerto Rico and Pacific Islands

August 8, 2013

Senator Tom Harkin, Chair
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education
Appropriations Committee
Room 131 Dirksen Building
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin:

The National Council of Social Security Administration Field Operation Locals is pleased to endorse, S. 1284, the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill for FY 2014. This legislation provides an additional \$535 million for Limitation on Administrative Expenses (LAE) because, as the Senate Report states: ***“The [Appropriations] Committee remains concerned about the impact of presently high workloads, coupled with recent budget constraints, on SSA’s ability to provide quality services.” “The Committee is deeply concerned that budget constraints are... impacting basic services to the American public while an aging population will continue to put increased demands on the Agency.”*** The bill also includes increases in funding for health, education and welfare programs that have an equally great need for resources. It is legislation well-worth the support of every Senator.

In the past two years, SSA has reduced staff by 9,200 or 10 percent of its workforce, closed every contact station around the country, cut hours of operation and eliminated over 50 field offices. As of February, 2013, SSA maintained a list of 50 ‘critical offices’ where the waiting lines exceeded an hour and people were being denied service. The situation is beyond critical and underlying support for program from the American public is in jeopardy.

All of this is, of course, unnecessary. The program has been starved of funding because of the misperception that SSA, like other government programs, primarily defense and corporate tax giveaways, is contributing to the federal deficit. It is not. The cost of operating the O.A.S.D.I. programs is borne entirely by their Trust Funds, not general revenues. Nor has SSA been in any way wasteful of the trust or money the public has contributed to the Trust Funds. Historically, taken together, the Old Age, Survivors, Disability, S.S.I. and Health Insurance programs are managed at less than 1.5 percent of program costs. No private insurance company comes close to matching that level of efficiency.

For all of these reasons, we thank you for your leadership on this bill and urge you to press hard for the adoption of the Committee bill by the full Congress. Thank you.

Retirement Myths: What Determines Your Retirement Annuity?

by [John Grobe](#) | August 12, 2013

This is the fifth article in a series dealing with common misconceptions about federal retirement. These articles are written by John Grobe and [Ehren Clovis](#).

Myth-conception: The amount that you have contributed to your retirement plan (FERS or CSRS) determines how much annuity you will receive and how long you will receive it.

Reality: Your FERS or CSRS annuity will continue for the rest of your life, and the amount of your annuity is determined by your high-3 average salary and your years of service. The amount that you contributed to FERS or CSRS doesn't matter.

Yes, it's a little hard to believe. "Too good to be true," as they say. But it's true: the amount of your contributions to FERS or CSRS has nothing to do with either the amount of your annuity from those sources or how long that annuity will last. The amount of your annuity is determined by applying your high-3 average salary and your years of service to the appropriate annuity formula. Most FERS employees will receive an annuity that is 1% (or 1.1%) of their high-3 average salary for each year of creditable FERS service. For example:

$0.01 \times \text{high-3 average salary} \times \text{years of service} = \text{Annual FERS annuity}$

$0.01 \times \$79,326 \times 31 = \$24,591.06$

As you can see, the amount of your contributions to FERS literally doesn't come into the equation.

Furthermore, your annuity will be paid to you **for the rest of your life**. Then, if you elected a survivor benefit for your spouse, your surviving spouse will likely receive a survivor annuity for the rest of his or her life. (The surviving spouse's benefit may be cut short, though, if he or she remarries before age 55.)

I'm a good example of how this plays out: Within the first 9 months of my retirement, I had already received annuity equal to the amount of my career retirement contributions. Even though I've already received an amount equal to my contributions, my annuity will continue for the rest of my life, which could be another 20-30 years.

There are a couple aspects of this that I want to comment on:

1. The amount of your contributions **does** play a role in the income taxes that you must pay on your FERS and CSRS annuity. For tax purposes, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) will distribute your own contributions over your anticipated lifetime, paying you a small monthly portion of "your contributions" each month. This portion of your monthly payment is **not** taxable because you already paid taxes on it. The bulk of your monthly annuity payment – usually 94% or more – **is** taxable, because it's made up of agency contributions and interest, which have never been taxed. The taxable portion of my own monthly annuity is almost 98% of the total. When the total of the small monthly portion of your contributions equals the total of your career contributions, then the entire amount of your annuity will be taxable.
2. The amount of contributions for "new" employees increased at the beginning of this year, under provisions of the *Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012*. New employees and returning employees who were not vested in FERS when they left will be required to pay the new FERS-RAE (FERS-Revised Annuity Employee) contribution rate of 3.1% or 3.6%. This change increases the "old" rates by more than 300%, since FERS employees usually contributed only .8% or 1.3% since FERS was created in 1987. Over their careers, new FERS employees will pay much more into their FERS accounts than their predecessors did. They will also have larger non-taxable portions of their annuities for much of their retirement (barring changes to the tax laws).

Even with the recent increase in contributions for new employees, a lifetime annuity payment—which has nothing to do with the amount of your contributions—is a wonderful thing. Most FERS retirees will receive 15 to 30 times the amount of their contributions in annuity payments during their lives. Also, the annuity provisions of both FERS and CSRS offer the possibility of a reduced benefit continuing for the life of a surviving spouse. Try finding that kind of return on investment anywhere else!

In any workplace, employees are without a doubt the fundamental component that holds any business or corporate organization together. Unfortunately, difficulties can arise between the parties that depend upon each other to make our workplaces function efficiently. Whether these difficulties originate from procedural misunderstandings or other sources, no workplace can remain its best without a mechanism by which such problems can be resolved. At stake is the company's long-term survival. In essence, it is vital that all involved recognize common goals and implement strategies to successfully achieve them—preferably along paths of least resistance.

While no organization will remain viable without proper management, it is important that those employed in critical functions remain productive. Fundamental to this is the presence of a positive environment conducive to satisfying task-oriented and dedicated workers. With this in mind, it should be said that informed employees who know their rights are an asset to the organization, not a liability. Even in an informal discussion with management, an awareness of one's rights goes a long way in harboring an environment of mutual respect among colleagues. Understanding that management is but one of the essential components reminds all who share a workspace that the objectives of the organization should reflect a culture that emphasizes the greater good, with consideration for all.

Sometimes management, charged with steering the direction of the organization, can be the very problem which impedes its progress. When this is the case, something must be done to rectify the situation. So how does an employee delicately communicate his needs to individuals who are in managerial positions to resolve problems that invariably occur in any working environment?

Again, knowing your rights as an employee is critical to ensuring that you are treated fairly in all situations. Can any one person know everything that there is to know about the intricacies of your rights? Probably not. Weaving the maze of rights vs. responsibilities can be a complex matter. However your union is comprised of a network of talented individuals with experience and expertise in a variety of workplace dilemmas. Unions provide resources and advice to those searching for answers. Part of the advantage to being in the union is the availability of access to the experiences of those who have dealt with cases similar to issue previously and are familiar with the procedures that work best in your circumstances. Also, genuine empathy, understanding and concern for you and your plight is part of the tradition of the labor union movement since its inception.

Enforcing your rights may be as easy as asking, or as difficult as taking legal steps. It is important to first understand why your employer may not be respecting your rights as an employee, if that is indeed the case. You are an employee, not a victim. Even when the law is on your side, a vindictive manager can still do a great deal to make your life miserable, particularly if you are acting on your own. On the other hand, an employer may simply not understand the law, and welcome expert guidance on their responsibilities. While action must be taken promptly, you should first be aware of all possible consequences. This will normally mean you should take expert advice. Contact your union representative.

The presence of a steward can help in many ways. For example:

- ◆ The steward can help a fearful or inarticulate employee explain what happened.
- ◆ The steward can raise extenuating factors.
- ◆ The steward can advise an employee against blindly denying everything, thereby giving the appearance of dishonesty and guilt.
- ◆ The steward can help prevent an employee from making fatal admissions.
- ◆ The steward can stop an employee from losing his or her temper, and perhaps getting fired for insubordination.
- ◆ The steward can serve as a witness to prevent supervisors from giving a false account of the conversation.

Always remember that you have the right to union representation.

This is a useful website to Your Rights at Work: <http://www.aflcio.org/Issues/Civil-and-Workplace-Rights/Your-Rights-at-Work>

