



## DRUG TESTING

You probably have noticed that AFGE has taken a position against the random drug testing of the federal workforce. (This is not to be confused with the testing of employees who had jobs which involve public health and safety). Perhaps, you reason that persons who do not use drugs have nothing to worry about. Unfortunately, life is not always that fair. I am concerned that the reasons for AFGE's position has not been clearly explained.

There are certain basic facts that you should know. (1) Not all drug tests are the same. That is, accuracy varies depending on the type used. The more accurate tests cost at least \$100 each. (2) Not all drug testing labs are equal. There are two types: Forensic and Clinical. Drug tests should be performed by forensic labs; however, their capacities have been exceeded by current demand, and clinical labs are now getting into the business. (3) There are certain commonly used and harmless substances that give false positives for illegal drugs. Some of these substances are: Amoxicillin (an antibiotic), tonic water and herbal tea - cocaine; Advil, nuprin, mediprin, motrin and refen - marijuana; Poppy-seeds (on rolls and buns) - opium/heroin.

Drug testing studies of federal employees have resulted in a positive rate of only .7%. That is, only 7 per 1000 of those tested were using some kind of illegal drug. This is hardly adequate to establish probable cause for testing the entire employee population. Based upon the .7% positive rate and \$100 per test, it would cost \$14,285 for each drug user detected. Due to the high cost, I doubt there would be general use of the more accurate testing procedure. Also, such an increase in volume would require greater use of clinical labs. Even less accurate alternative, in addition to clinical labs, could come into use because they are quicker and cheaper.

Employees problems with false positive test results would probably be compounded by management officials who had little or no understanding of the issues and with a high degree concern in protecting their own interests. Employees are deemed guilty until proven innocent in the administrative process. Assuming a falsely charge employee eventually wins his/her case, there is no way that he/she could be made fully whole from the harm that had been done.

One could understand a random testing program if there was reason to believe that federal employees are a problem group; however, as indicated above, this clearly is not the case. It is not possible to justify such testing based upon effective use of law enforcement resources. Also, drug using federal employees are subject to being detected through existing provision for job related conduct. There is good reason to believe that federal employees have been targeted because they are a visible group which good public relations and political mileage can be generated.

What are the protections available? First, AFGE is litigating the issue to get a judicial determination on the constitutional protections. Second, the Union will bargain to obtain an agreement on procedural safeguards. Admittedly, a relatively small percentage will probably be victims of false negative tests. However, for the unfortunate few, such occurrences would be disastrous.

Sy Overturf, Pres. Local 2505

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Now that Dorcas Hardy is gone...

### HOW AFGE MEMBERS PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE

SSA employees have a long and proud history of being advocates for the claimants and beneficiaries they serve. Serving the public has become more and more difficult in recent years.

Under Dorcas Hardy, SSA employees endured staffing reductions and many misguided policy decisions. Thousands of Union members stood up to the former Commissioner by signing petitions to former HHS Secretary Otis Bowen citing "no confidence" in Hardy's performance.

Hundreds of workers filed affidavits with AFGE and Congress describing the multitude of problems at SSA. Seeing the Agency's integrity compromised, employees supplied source documents to the Union. AFGE was able to share hundreds of Agency documents with Congress regarding the problems. As time passed, it was clear Hardy had to go.

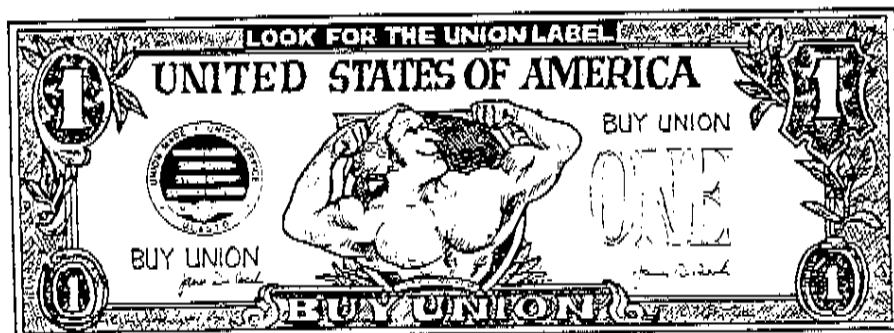
Two issues that AFGE made public to the press were particularly helpful in pushing Hardy out the door; her secret changes in OHA regulations denying hearing rights to claimants and her practice of using scarce computer time to supply credit bureaus and banks with Social Security number information.

AFGE leaked the Agency document regarding the changes in OHA to the NEW YORK TIMES. The full Ways & Means Committee held a hearing on the issue in late 1988. After a chorus of criticism, Hardy withdrew the changes.

The TRW credit agency issue blew up on the former Commissioner soon after another TIMES article described SSA's deal with the private sector company to give negative verifications of individuals' SSNs.

USA TODAY and others picked up the story. AFGE supplied source material to the House Government Operations Subcommittee that deals with privacy issues. Hardy's response to that committee and to the Senate Special Committee on Aging, which was also investigating the "800 number" problems, assured her eventual departure.

All the whistle-blowing by loyal employees and AFGE paid off, proving that Unity is power. (The above summary is courtesy of AFGE Local 1923, which represents SSA employees in Baltimore.)



“—Strengthen your American dollars—Buy Union!”

## AFGE CALLS FOR SYSTEM OVERHAUL TO END CRISIS

Calling the gap between private sector and federal salaries a "canyon," the Advisory Committee on Federal Pay recommended a 10% increase in federal worker salaries and additional raises to wipe out the shortfall over the next four years.

The committee reported that the average pay gap for fiscal year 1989 - the difference in salary between white-collar workers in the federal service and those in private industry - had widened to 28.6% from 26.3% a year ago.

Government Employees President John Sturdivant called for a major overhaul of the civil service pay system "if the government's current recruitment and retention crisis is to be stopped."

He criticized the "piecemeal approaches" - benefiting only a small number of federal workers - that were included as demonstration projects in House and Senate appropriations bills as failing to "address the overall pay deterioration problem."

The proposed pay raise of 3.6% in January 1990 "does not even keep up with the current rate of inflation" let alone begin to close the gap, he said.

The committee stressed that a 10% pay hike is necessary "to send a strong message that the federal government is serious about the need to recruit and retain well qualified employees."

Agencies and offices nationwide are seeking to escape the general schedule pay system to help find and keep qualified workers, the committee said, citing examples of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., which provides an additional cost-of-living- payment, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which pays agents reassigned to the New York metropolitan area a lump sum bonus and administrative law judges who are seeking special corps status to receive higher salaries.

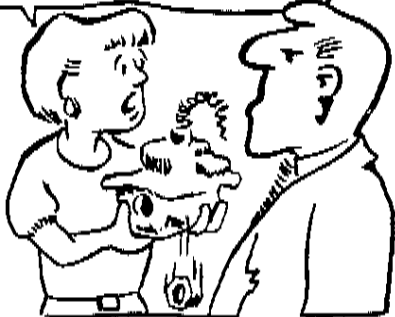
This system "was tried and found disruptive" in the early 1920's, the committee warned, stressing that the government must redesign its pay procedures.

The committee also recommended that:

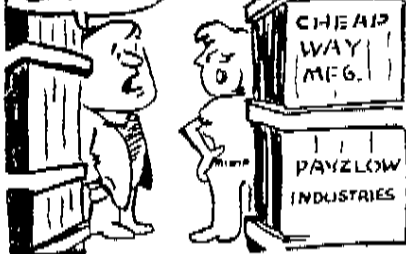
- 0 Locality pay legislation - with wages based on the cost of living or a survey of private sector wages paid in that area - be adopted by Congress.
- 0 An innovative health benefit program be developed, to counter the declining health care options available to federal workers.
- 0 The pay cap on 1,000 workers in the highest grades of the general schedule be removed and that salaries of the top leaders of the judicial and executive branches be increased by 25%.

AFGE supports a locality based pay system modeled after the Federal Prevailing Rate Advisory Committee and the establishment of a tripartite committee to oversee the system. (The above article and graft following are reprinted from AFL-CIO NEWS, September 2, 1989 issue.)

HEY, WHAT GIVES HERE?  
THE QUALITY OF THESE  
PARTS IS AWFUL.



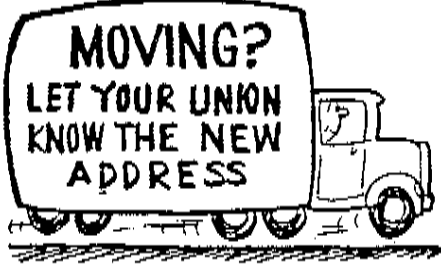
YEA, I KNOW. WE  
SUBCONTRACTED THOSE  
TO A PLACE THAT  
BUILDS 'EM DIRT  
CHEAP.



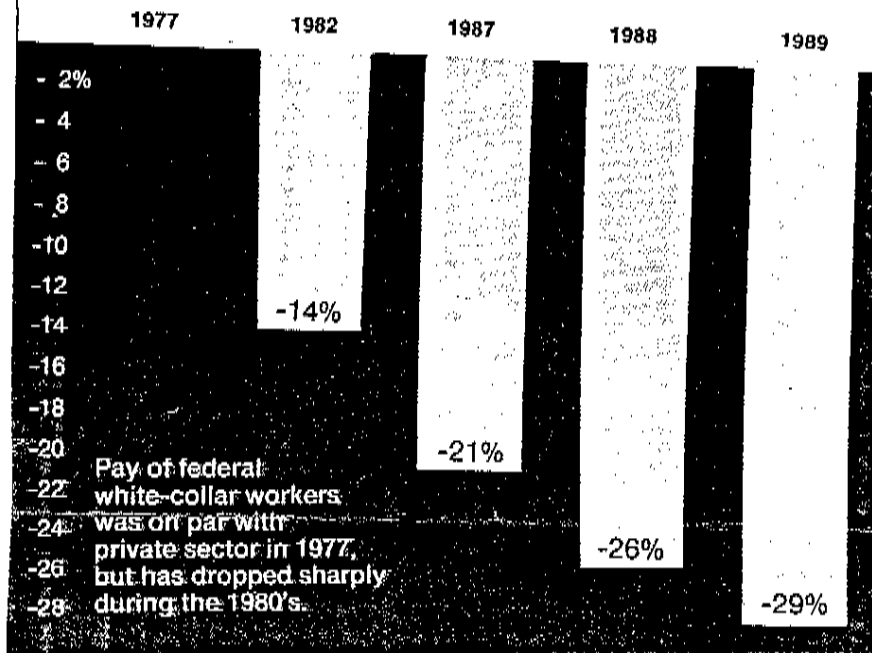
BUT THE QUALITY IS  
SO BAD. WHY DO WE  
KEEP USING THEM?



PROFIT, ODDLES AND  
ODDLES AND ODDLES  
OF PROFIT.



# Federal Pay Gap Deepens



SOURCE: Advisory Committee on Federal Pay

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## MEALS AND INCIDENTAL EXPENCES (M&IE)

You were informed in the last newsletter of litigation to get additional M&IE for employees who attended long term classes (over 30 days) in the Dallas Training Center prior to 1989. The Unfair Labor Practice against the Regional Commissioner has been withdrawn in favor of merging the issue into an existing National level grievance concerning similar issues. This grievance, if successful, will provide for greater retroactive relief. The arbitration of this national grievance has been scheduled in December, but the Arbitrator decided to spend the winter in New Zealand. A new Arbitrator will be selected and the arbitration will be scheduled in early 1990.

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## STATUS OF THE NATIONAL CONTRACT

The new contract is still before the Federal Impasse Panel and hearings have been scheduled for Sept 18, 1989. The process had been put on hold because it was hoped that AFGE National President, John N Sturdivant, would be able to arrange a meeting with the new SSA Commissioner and resolve all issues. However, Comm. King declined to meet with Sturdivant, and the Impasses Panel has resumed its normal process. It is unknown if Comm. King's refusal to meet was a "Dorcasism" or she felt that she was unprepared to engage in such discussions. There is a General Committee - Commissioner meeting scheduled for mid-October. Perhaps, we will get a feel as to where she is coming from during this meeting.

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