

New National Contract

To: All AFGE Members
From: Witold Skwierczynski
President, AFGE Council 220

AFGE and SSA have a new contract. We will be spending the coming weeks planning contract training for our Locals and providing information to union members about changes in the agreement that will have an impact on them.

A more detailed background and history of the negotiations will appear in the next issue of *UNITY*, our national newsletter, which will be mailed to your homes soon. The following paragraphs, however, will give you an idea of what we were up against.

After our members rejected the first contract, the union negotiators believed we had an opportunity to renegotiate the agreement by demonstrating our members' concerns and seeking modifications to management's language. However, SSA made it clear that it was not interested in *any* changes and threatened to impose more restrictions and take additional rights and benefits away. We were given a "take it or leave it" proposal and informed that we had until midnight to agree or SSA would send more unpleasant terms to the Federal Service Impasses Panel (FSIP), which resolves bargaining disputes.

The union did not want to send any contract language to the FSIP because we were aware of recent rulings by this Bush-appointed, anti-labor board in which federal employee and union rights have been decimated.

We were able to obtain a brief extension to allow time to confer with AFGE officers from the six SSA components. After discussions with Local Presidents and other officers, all six components agreed to ratify the April contract—the contract that was originally rejected—to ensure that our members did not suffer under worse working conditions that SSA guaranteed it would impose.

We considered litigation against SSA because we believed it was committing an unfair labor practice by not bargaining in good faith. However, Mark Roth, AFGE's General Counsel, who joined our union's national bargaining team, assured us that the Federal Labor Relations Authority would sustain management's actions.

The Union, therefore, notified SSA that the contract was ratified. There will be no additional rank and file ratification process because SSA's final offer, which enabled us to avoid the FSIP, eliminated that option.

The contract has now been submitted for a 30-day agency head review that is required by statute. We expect the contract to go into effect some time after the review is completed.

I should make it clear that I am personally very unhappy with this contract. However, I am also practical enough to appreciate the climate that we find ourselves. After all, this is the most anti-labor, anti-federal administration we have ever faced. There are numerous political appointees at SSA who do nothing more than the bidding of the White House—and part of their agenda is to do whatever it can to eliminate the role of unions in the federal work place, to reduce employee rights, and give government executives sole discretion in all areas of personnel management.

What's next? We should not despair but learn from this experience. The reason SSA management went after the SSA employee's contract is due to the nature of Washington DC politics. That needs to be changed. We must work together to put new blood in Congress and the White House--to populate them with elected officials that care about the federal workers who carry out the business of government.

There's much to do and we will all need to do our share. So, let's roll up our sleeves and get to work. The Union will survive. We will train your union officers on the contract, keep you informed, enforce employee contractual and statutory rights, and represent you as needed.

In the coming weeks and months we will be communicating with you about additional actions we will be taking. Contract negotiations are now ended; but the story is not over. We have just entered a new chapter.

In solidarity,
/s/

Witold Skwierczynski
President, AFGE Council 220