



THE VOICE

We can do great things together

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 6

OF CHAPTER 247

ACS NIGHTSHIFT RETURNS!

Chapter 247 Signs Settlement Over Tours of Duty Arbitration

The ACS nightshift returned to the Austin Service Center August 8, as Chapter 247's long battle to defend its local Alternative Work Schedules agreements against a series of management assaults climaxed in dazzling victories in both the Compliance and Accounts Management directorates. In a settlement negotiated by the Chapter and IRS lawyers, the Agency guaranteed that all grievants in the ACS arbitration case would be returned to their old Tours of Duty *no later than March 31, 2006*.

In telling contrast to Accounts Management Honcho **Charles Washington's** actions in the Toll Free arbitration decision (see accompanying story), Compliance management did not exhaust all appeals, attempt to ignore a third party decision, or begrudge employees their remedy; rather, they stepped up to the plate and worked closely with Chapter 247 to implement the decision swiftly and equitably.

Twenty Collections Representatives ushered in the first wave of nightshifters on August 8. The majority of displaced ACS night employees—those who lent their names to the original grievance—will return first, by Enter On Duty (EOD) order. The rest of the nightshift employees will follow, by EOD position.

NTEU salutes Austin's Compliance Director, **Dick Auby**, and ACS Operations Manager, **Wanda Brown**, for their professionalism in handling this transition.

Toll Free Decision: Charles No Longer In Charge?

Ending a bloody, bitter fight, Accounts Management Director **Charles Washington reversed the action** that had forced Toll Free employees to later Tours Of Duty and broken the local Alternative Work Schedules (AWS) agreement in the process. The triumphant employees returned to their original TODs on March 21.

In January 2003, Chapter 247 refused to acquiesce in Charles' plan to force 80 Toll Free employees with TODs beginning before 8:00 a.m. to later start times in defiance of the AWS agreement. A third party arbitrator ruled that **"the Union's refusal to renegotiate the start times found in the AWS was proper,"** and ordered that the affected employees "be returned to the tours of duty held prior to the Agency's unilateral change..."

Charles appealed the decision to the Federal Labor Relations Authority, who upheld the arbitrator and Chapter 247's position. With his authority in question, the Director directed his wagons to circle, responding to NTEU Chapter President **Eddie Walker's** demand to implement the decision with a Hamlet-style demurral:

"Eddie, I received and am in the process of reviewing/analyzing the decision issued by the [FLRA] to determine whether or not I intend to appeal the matter further."

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Enough, already!

AM's Amazing Charles Washington:
The Longest Disappearing Act In Showbiz?
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"REVERSAL OF FORTUNE"

Eddie Walker, Chapter 247 President
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EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESULTS

Employees Take A Stand For Change
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THE VOICE IS PREPARED AND PRODUCED FOR THE
SOLE PURPOSE OF INFORMING OUR BARGAINING UNIT
EMPLOYEES. *ALL OTHERS READ AT THEIR OWN RISK.*

THE VOICE

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ICE, ICE, BABY

Chapter 247 Brings Relief To Parched Customer Service Building Members

Texas summer slapped the Customer Service Building hard, with much needed ice machines breaking down and leaving employees hot and justifiably bothered.

First, the Atrium ice maker went belly up. Next, the Cafeteria machine succumbed to the increased demand. When employees tried to make use of the third and final ice machine, Cafeteria management, in an uncool move, plopped a price tag on their ice supply.

To Chapter 247, already exerting heat on management over the ice meltdown, profiteering was the final straw in a quickly evaporating situation.

NTEU acquired a giant ice chest, loaded it up with the frozen treasure, and offered unlimited quantities to its members. The members made full use of their union privileges.

By the time management had fulfilled their managerial responsibilities and the machines were up and running again, a cruel, cruel summer had been avoided, thanks to NTEU Chapter 247 going the extra mile for its members.



WEDDING COUNTDOWN

The wedding of Chapter President **Eddie Walker** and longtime love interest **Laurie Lee** has been set for October 29 in Las Vegas.

Elvis impersonators will not be discouraged from attending, although none are expected.

LEGISLATIVE & MEMBERSHIP AWARENESS

Chapter 247's Legislative Committee conducted a three-day employee outreach event in May in the Customer Service and South Tech buildings.

Members were asked for address and E-mail updates in order to enable an easy and swift communication chain from the chapter to the members and finally to their legislators over urgent issues affecting federal employees.

Hundreds took advantage of the Legislative/Membership Awareness '05 program. Members who participated received NTEU logo-adorned trinkets of their choice.

(Originally published in W&I Offline newsletter.)



FIGHTING BACK & WINNING

NTEU Chapter 52's President **Tom Jones** led his members in a week-long rally and informational picket outside Austin's Rundberg Square Taxpayer Assistance Center (TAC), and Chapter 247's members were there in force, pitching in. The Rundberg TAC was on the hit list of 68 nationwide that the IRS planned to close, until NTEU's members across the country rose with an awesome roar and forced the Agency to back down. Visitors to the Rundberg office the week of NTEU's protest were incredulous that Austin's taxpayers would have had to drive 80 miles to find a tax assistor under the IRS plan. 95% of the Rundberg visitors readily signed a petition to keep Austin's TAC open.

NTEU's "No Taxpayer Left Behind" campaign included Boston, Albany, New York City, Dallas, Fresno, and other TAC locations. Members staged rallies and conducted petition drives to provide signatures to members of Congress. In the process, NTEU successfully employed the aid of governors, mayors, and local political leaders.

Although Chapter 52 represents Austin's only TAC office, Chapter 247's members were there to lend a hand the entire week of the Rundberg picket. In a letter to National President **Colleen Kelley**, Tom Jones wrote, "I Chapter 247's stewards stepped up to the plate on short notice and took leave to support their brothers in Chapter 52 during the week of June 6, 2005. We in Chapter 52 truly appreciate the support they provided us not only morally, but more importantly physically, walking a picket line in 95 degree plus temperatures, and a very typical humid South Texas summer."

We couldn't agree with Tom more when he wrote, "I know that each and every one of my stewards and members learned that cooperation between chapters is more than just words on a piece of paper."

Employee Satisfaction or Employee Engagement?

“Neither,” Say Employees To Management’s Plan To Skew Survey Data

The attempt by IRS honchos to take over the 2005 Employee Satisfaction Survey backfired big time, with NTEU leading the resistance to cynical management manipulation of data and results.

Chapter 247 has received higher average ratings from members in response to Employee Satisfaction Survey questions each year for the past three years. So when 247 stepped forward to urge a boycott of the survey, employees listened.

By the time the dust had cleared, all of the operations in the chapter’s province were way, way down in participation in the Survey (see the chart below).

To no one’s surprise, *Accounts Management showed the greatest employee disaffection*, with participation levels of 26% for Adjustments—probably the most rapidly deteriorating area to work in the Customer Service/South Tech domain—and 30% for Toll Free.

National NTEU President **Colleen Kelley** addressed members in a series of messages posted on the NTEU website (www.nteu.org) and blown up to poster size for display by Chapter 247. Colleen laid it out

“All of the operations in the chapter’s province were way, way down in participation in the Survey...”

for the troops.

“It is with some regret that I withdrew union support for this survey. NTEU has championed this annual survey process since its beginning in 1993.

“It was NTEU that first proposed the survey to the IRS, given the success that major corporations, such as Federal Express, had with such a process. *Recent changes by the IRS have weakened the survey*, including removing verbatim comments that allowed employees to anonymously express critical concerns; eliminating divisional and functional questions that helped identify specific problem areas; and abolishing a requirement to hold group meetings to review results.

“In addition, management has failed to correct serious flaws, the most

alarming of which is that *managers who score low are too often promoted or rewarded...*

“... Your chapter president and I are asking that you join us in showing your displeasure with the current state of affairs by choosing not to complete this year’s survey.”

Chapter 247 employed its considerable flyer distribution system to get the word out to employees. The employees, in turn, rose to the occasion, sending a concise, unmistakable message to management that they would no longer tolerate the abuse of a process that once promised to speak truth to power, but now was being pre-programmed for pretense by the petty balancers of bureaucracy.

Even in defeat, management tried to pull a fast one, changing the no longer fashionable concept of “employee satisfaction” to “employee engagement,” as if lowering our ambitions would somehow spur our participation.

Wrong again. Now the time has come to negotiate a new Survey agreement between NTEU and, we trust, a wiser—as well as a chastened—management.

EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION IN THE SURVEY

Operation	2005	2004	Drop In Participation
ACS	38%	84%	down 55%
Exam	33%	75%	down 56%
Collections	56%	83%	down 33%
Toll Free	30%	81%	down 63%
Adjustments	26%	74%	down 65%

NTEU & ACS:



KEEPING AN EYE ON QUALITY

Over the past few months, ACS management has made **quality** the operation's priority. In order to achieve its goals, management has increased the number of telephone monitors its managers conduct per month. Collection Representatives with NQRS errors receive extra reviews and training. In addition, a quality group has been developed to conduct extra monitors and increase consistency.

The result? Employees have voiced their concerns that the pressure from management has caused them to make more errors. Manager Jan Sutton was chosen to lead the Quality group, and originally employees received phone monitor reviews for evaluative purposes. Employees were concerned that the inconsistencies between their team manager and Jan could result in a negative impact on their performance and their evaluations.

NTEU met with ACS Operation Chief **Wanda Brown**, and agreed that the monitors done in this group would be **nonevaluative**. In Impact and Implementation meetings, NTEU and management agreed that when an employee receives a NQRS error, the employee will get extra monitors, but

it will be feedback only. This will ensure that the employee is aware of errors, and prevent them in the future. Instead of being punished for making an error, the employee will receive valuable input.

In order to get employees' input on ACS issues, management proposed to hold focus group meetings with employees. NTEU selected strong employee representatives to ensure the effectiveness and productivity of the meetings. The employees met with the Operation chief and offered their feedback and ideas on the subject of quality.

Meanwhile, management and NTEU worked together to implement a settlement negotiated by the Chapter and IRS lawyers, guaranteeing that former ACS night-shift employees would be returned to their old Tours of Duty no later than March 31, 2006. The realignment of day- and swingshift CRs to night, combined with a national management initiative to set employee/manager ratios at 15 to 1, created the need for a realignment of all ACS teams. Again, Chapter 247 worked successfully with management to minimize the impact and to create an equitable transition for employees relocated by the move.

In addition, Agency lawyers resolved an arbitration case with 247 by awarding Bilingual bonuses to ACS employees who were mistakenly denied them. We trust that the issue of Bilingual awards has been settled.

NTEU is committed to continuing its efforts to achieve a positive, progressive outcome for employees through the Win/Win process.



NTEU & COLLECTIONS: REDEFINING THE FUTURE



Transition has become a familiar watchword at the IRS, and Compliance Services Collection Operation (CSCO) is no stranger to change.

It is NTEU Chapter 247's mission to make any coming transitions as painless and seamless as possible. Recently, CSCO embarked on the first leg of a restructuring plan authored by longtime consultants to the IRS, Booz Allen Hamilton. As with most reorganizations, we can expect a change in work assignments and more retraining.

NTEU has been leading the charge when it comes to addressing employees' issues brought on by the reorganization. Chapter 247 and CSCO management have been working together through the Collections Partnership Committee to resolve employee issues. After management received national directives regarding First Read changes, they met with the Partnership Committee to discuss the issues. Both sides worked together to ensure that the opportunity to work First Read was shared equitably between employees.

Earlier this year it was determined that CSCO in Austin would be the centralized site for the ASFR toll free line. Concerns arose when additional phone duty assignments

(Continued on next page)

LABOR RELATIONS STAGES COUP

Labor Relations was established as an advisory aid for management. They interpreted law and regulations for management, so management could make informed decisions. Along the way, however, a shift in power has occurred.

Instead of informing management of its options, LR is now informing management of which action to take, and **management is following along like a herd of sheep.**

"LR told me to do it," is the frequent cry of firstline managers. Rather than take the Labor Relations Specialist's advice as advice, management is now kowtowing to every LR whim as if the final decision does not rest with management.

Firstline managers have little enough autonomy. Why are they handing over the miniscule amount of decision-making power that they have? And why is Labor Relations, ostensibly there to promote better relations between management and employees, taking such a persistent hard line? Why the hostility towards the beleaguered employees? LR is giving training sessions to management on how to more effectively document employees and how to block any protests by the employees. With the tail wagging the dog, do employees stand a chance?

The reason firstline managers have the power to make decisions regarding their employees is that they know the employees and the situation best. LR is issuing commands without ever having met the employees, and having no idea of what is actually happening in the unit. NTEU believes that management must have the moral courage to use their own best judgment when decisions are made which affect the lives of their employees.

COOPERATION SCORES FOR EXAM EMPLOYEES

NTEU and Exam have been working together in partnership to address issues before they become problems. NTEU and Exam's Operation Manager, **John Lindsley**, meet regularly to work towards these ends. The following are some examples of issues which have been resolved through working together in partnership.

Employees alerted NTEU to a possible plan to move clerks and form a centralized clerical group. NTEU met with John Lindsley to discuss the possibility. Both sides agreed that the current situation was not broken and that there was no need to fix anything with a new plan.

Exam had a few empty cubicles that had become a health and safety issue. They had been sitting unused for some time and were building up dust and dirt. On the other hand, Adjustments had some hanging files which they no longer needed since the implementation of Correspondence Imaging (CIS) and the "demise" of paper. Exam still deals with paper, so they used the extra space to install the hanging files from Adjustments for possible future use. These discussions led to a win/win situation for all.

Employees complained about sporadic meetings in Exam and NTEU brought the concern to John, who recognized that employees need to meet on a regular basis to exchange information and deal with new issues. Chapter 247 and the Operation Manager pledged to cooperate to get the employees what they need to perform at their best.

Exam has announced more opportunities for permanent employment in their area, due to attrition and additional hiring authority. NTEU is dedicated to assisting management in making sure that the promotion

process adheres to Article 13 and that employees are made aware of the promotion process outlined in the National Agreement.

Correspondence Imaging has created an impact on Exam as well as Adjustments, due to the routing of CATA cases. At press time, more problems have emerged with CIS and the routing of CATA cases back from Exam. NTEU will do its part to see that the new technology is adapted to meet the real needs of employees as well as to improving the efficiency of their jobs.

When management and NTEU cooperate, it leads to a more efficient and less stressful working environment for employees.

COLLECTIONS: REDEFINING THE FUTURE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

for employees were proposed. NTEU met with employees and delivered their concerns directly to management's door. An ongoing process has emerged to deal with the issues, and Chapter 247 will report on our progress throughout the transition.

As we move forward through the next few years to implement the changes that will be brought about by national decisions, NTEU will work diligently with local management to address employee concerns and protect employee rights.

IT'S OVER

For readers of *The Voice* who have been following the arbitration case involving Austin Accounts Management and Chapter President Eddie Walker: All issues relating to the case have now been settled.

Jill Jarboe

WINNER OF THE 2ND NTEU 247
CHAPTER SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY CONTEST

What would America be like without unions?



If I were an average employee in the U.S. today, and unions had been erased from our country's history, my typical morning would probably be something like this:

My wind-up alarm clock goes off and I fumble in the dark to light a candle. It's a cold day and I can't afford electricity or heat. I make less than \$3.00 an hour since there has been no organized effort for a minimum wage.

I'm a single parent like most women in the U.S. Divorce rates are sky high, in part because the pressures from poverty have led to widespread alcoholism. My ex-husband lives on the street somewhere, having drowned his financial problems in whiskey.

Without unions, most of the population has been kept at starvation wages since the industrial revolution, so the middle class has never developed. Workers don't have much power to influence the gov-

ernment. We have been unable to bring electricity and potable water to poor communities like mine. Diseases run rampant. My five year old boy has a raging fever but I dare not miss work since it could cost me my job. He will have to stay home with one of the older girls.

With no history of union activism, the country still has child labor. We are all employed at the I.R.S. My children open mail and stamp a received date on documents. Only about 7 per cent of the population makes enough money to file tax returns so there are few I.R.S. jobs and most of them, like ours, only last five months a year. Without unions, workers have been unable

"We head for the bus stop and wait there, breathing in noxious fumes. Without unions, there has been no way to organize against deadly emissions that poison workers' lungs within and around factories."

to build a movement to initiate unemployment benefits or other services for laborers. During the months we are laid off, my family and I spend most of the time searching for odd jobs.

We head for the bus stop and wait there, breathing in noxious fumes. Without unions, there has been no way to organize against deadly emissions that poison workers'

lungs within and around factories. The air is grey and our clothes are soon sprinkled with black ash. We talk about what we'll do on Sunday, our one day off. The children want me to take them to a house where the owners charge people to watch a television run by a generator. It breaks my heart to tell them we won't have the money to go.

Since most children work in the fields or factories whenever they can, there is not much need of schools. My children are destined to a life of illiteracy, fatigue, poverty, and struggling to find employment. There are rumors that we may all get laid off next week. They say my manager is going to replace us with some of his relatives. Without a union to oppose nepotism, this threat is always hanging over our heads.

I dream about moving the family to Europe. I hear unions are allowed there and workers have a decent life.



Jill

Jarboe works as a CSR in Toll Free, but her creative edge was honed as a professional journalist and songwriter with an interest in nature preservation.

Toll Free Decision: Charles No Longer In Charge?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The Chapter President responded aptly, "Our NTEU Field Office has advised us that you have no further appeals. Chapter 247 demands that you implement the changes to tours of duty by the next pay period."

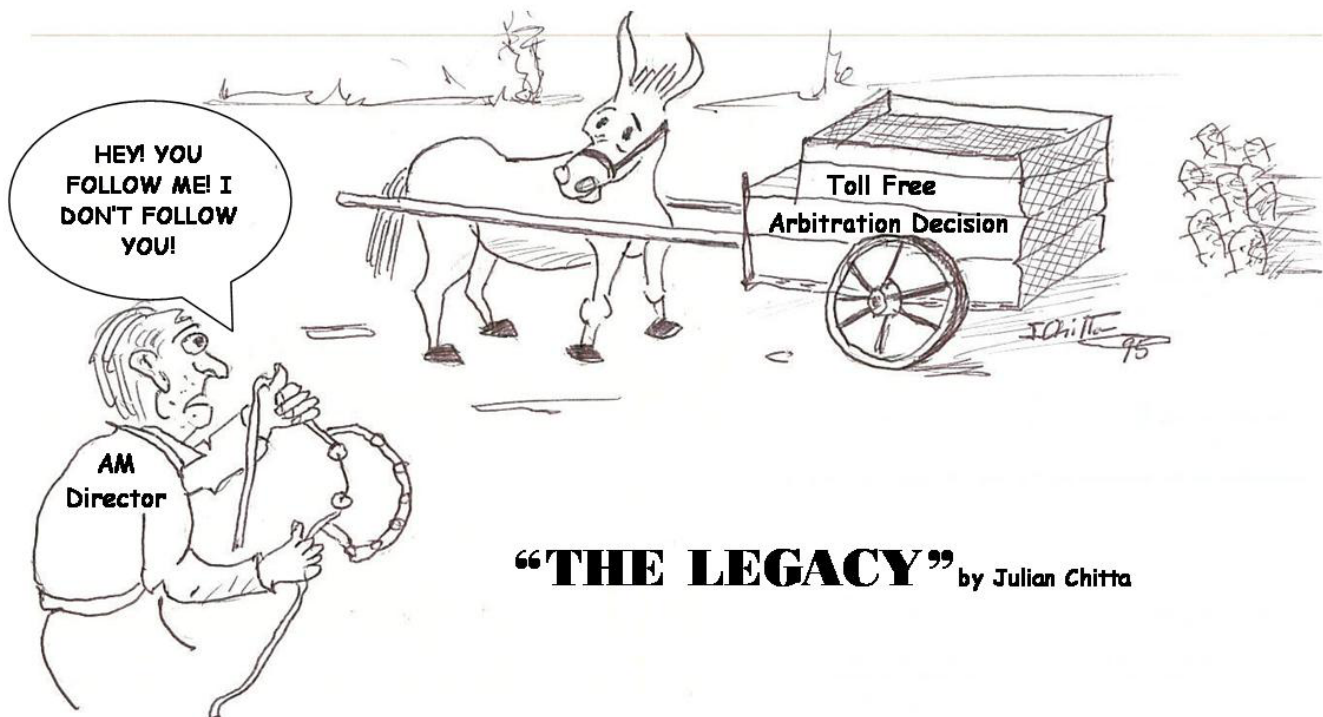
At earlier Toll Free Town Hall meetings initiated by Chapter 247, Charles was asked what he would do in response to the arbitrator's then recent order to return all impacted employees back to their original TODs. The AM Poohbah replied that management had appealed, but in the case of an appeal decision favorable to Chapter 247, he would "follow the law."

With no options left for the embattled Director—despite his lordly assertion—NTEU began a lobbying campaign, with union stewards and employees donning "Follow The Law" buttons, and the chapter jawboning high ranking IRS officials and members of Congress.

The Chapter President expressed 247's view. "Following the law is something that we, as federal employees, are required to do every day. It's only right and just—and about time—that ***the Austin Accounts Management Director follow the law.***"

Finally, in the days before NTEU was to stage a picket in front of the IRS Austin Customer Service Building, Charles ingested the bitter pill that was the inevitable medicine for management's misdeeds and implemented the arbitrator's ruling.

Although the Great Director seemed reluctant to follow the law, in the end he had no choice but to ***swallow the law.***



"THE LEGACY" by Julian Chitta

REFLECTIONS IN A SWOLLEN EYE

NTEU LEADS FIGHT FOR LARGER COMPUTER MONITORS

The Correspondence Imaging System (CIS) was rolled out in the fall of 2003 to Austin Adjustments Customer Service Representatives as a computer software pilot program. The result was a real eye opener for employees.

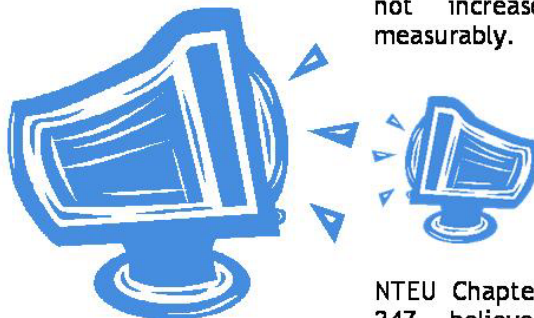
Instead of a CSR scrutinizing one computer window against paper taxpayer documents on a desk in front of him or her, CIS introduced multiple windows to the equation. Employees had to adapt to a case being scattered over potentially dozens of Lilliputian-sized "thumbnails." The thumbnails required that an employee select and enlarge each one individually to read the information more carefully.

A CIS user must manipulate IDRS, the CIS active page, the CIS document page, and—at varying times—SERP, ICP's multiple screens, the multiprint screen, and other computer windows. The choice for the CSR is between a multiplicity of windows with data that is too small to read easily, or larger data on fewer screens that cannot be compared. This kaleidoscope of images is difficult to manage, and requires continuous changing and manipulation of screens to work the cases.

CIS has further automated the work of the CSR, and this is all to the good. Unfortunately, employees with 17 inch monitors have not been given adequate tools to meet the new demands of the job.

As part of a short and ill-

conceived pilot, approximately 45 CSRs—selected through a process known only to management—were given 22 inch monitors. After first concealing the existence of the pilot from Chapter 247, then refusing to negotiate, and finally withholding the resulting pilot data from NTEU, Austin Accounts Management's hapless Operation 2 chiefs declared the experiment a failure, claiming that production did not increase measurably.



NTEU Chapter 247 believes that management failed to equitably distribute the monitors. Furthermore, 247 believes that Accounts Management upper management botched the pilot. Finally, NTEU believes that larger monitors should be provided to all employees on health grounds.

NTEU filed a mass grievance on behalf of 116 employees in Accounts Management Operations 1 and 2 in order to force management to provide 22 inch monitors to all employees working with CIS.

In the Second Step grievance hearing, NTEU brought four of the grievants to the meeting as witnesses. The witnesses gave compelling and well reasoned accounts of why larger monitors for all CSRs was excellent business sense—as well as common sense—and talked about the personal

and physical effect the inadequate monitors had on them.

The employees recounted having to squint to read small fonts, because of the smaller monitors and the number of windows that they have to keep open at any one time. Chapter 247 argued that this is causing eyestrain, headaches, neck and shoulder pain, tired, irritated eyes, and blurred vision, which are the common symptoms of Computer Visual Syndrome (CVS).

NTEU introduced data regarding CVS, a condition that optometrists warn is growing more prevalent than Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. Experts point out that even a small amount of uncorrected vision problems due to CVS can lead to a 4% to 19% decrease in a worker's visual task performance. Symptoms include headaches, loss of focus, burning and tired eyes, double or blurred vision, and neck and shoulder pain.

NTEU argued that this violates management's obligation under Article 27 to provide healthful working conditions for all employees.

In addition, Chapter 247 maintained that management is adversely affecting employees with regard to their performance evaluations, and that providing larger monitors to some employees amounts to disparate treatment, since the inferior monitors make it more difficult to work with multiple application windows. With smaller monitors, employees are more likely to make errors or take longer on each case because they have to flip back and forth between windows.

(Continued on next page)

REFLECTIONS IN A SWOLLEN EYE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

NTEU further argued that management is losing productivity, wasting paper in a supposedly paperless system, and creating more errors by not providing its employees the tools necessary to do their jobs.

At one point in the meeting, management raised the issue of reasonable accommodation, indicating that RA was the appropriate avenue to address the issue of larger monitors, rather than in a grievance. Witnesses quickly jumped on this foolish and insensitive statement, suggesting that now was the time to address the health question, before employees were adversely affected. Some observed that a large number of employees could find medical documentation to support a reasonable accommodation for a larger monitor.

NTEU's position is that management should resolve this issue, both for business reasons and out of concern for the health and wellbeing of their employees. The alternative is to deal with the 116 reasonable accommodation requests that will be coming soon to Austin Accounts Management.



DID YOU KNOW...

By federal law, *Adjustments and Toll Free cannot require you to close a specific number of cases* or link the number of cases you close to your evaluation? Report any violations to NTEU immediately. Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998 (RRA '98), Section 1203.

NTEU'S 50th NATIONAL CONVENTION - CHAPTER 247 RECEIVES AWARD

National NTEU President **Colleen Kelley** and Executive Vice President **Frank Ferris** presented Chapter 247 with the NTEU Membership Recognition Award at the 50th National Convention in San Diego this August. The award highlighted the chapter's "successful efforts in sustaining and increasing membership and building our union."

Representing 247's members at the convention were President **Eddie Walker**, Executive Vice President **Julia Miller**, and First Vice President **Russell Bokelman**. Eddie raised and discussed critical employee issues in a private meeting between Colleen and Frank and the nation's IRS Service Center presidents. Eddie, Julia, and Russell voted to support what NTEU expects to be its top priorities over the next two years.

High on the "to do" list was NTEU's recognition that employees whose responsibilities include **bilingual work should receive premium pay** as compensation for those additional skills. Also at the top of the union's agenda was **vigorous resistance to contracting out** federal jobs to fly by night companies with little loyalty to taxpayers. (The current government goal is to eliminate 50 per cent of federal employees.)

NTEU & TOLL FREE JOIN FORCES...TO PARTY!

NTEU and Toll Free linked forces in celebration of an incredibly successful filing season, as well as the promise of *a new spirit of co-operation between Operation 1 management and Chapter 247*.

Choosing to resolve a dispute over Bilingual Awards to Toll Free employees instead of forcing the issue into arbitration, management reached a settlement with NTEU to pay all qualified bilingual CSRs their awards from 2003 and 2004. To return this demonstration of good faith, Chapter 247 contributed money and its trademark balloons to Operation 1's employee appreciation celebration. Chapter President **Eddie Walker** joined Operation 1 Manager **Della Thomas** in presenting awards to Toll Free employees.

Not only was Austin Toll Free recognizing their position as number one in the nation for the first quarter, with Accounts Managements' quality rating of 95.06 percent, they were also celebrating their 10 year anniversary. Both quality and productivity were something to brag about (although productivity can *only* be measured at an Operations level, due to Federal laws prohibiting the measurement of individual CSRs).

Eddie and Della both stressed the importance of teamwork among the employees. NTEU hopes for continued cooperation between NTEU and Toll Free management in order to guarantee even greater success for Operation 1 in the future.



DEPUTY DAGO BRIEFS EMPLOYEES...BRIEFLY



6:00 PM

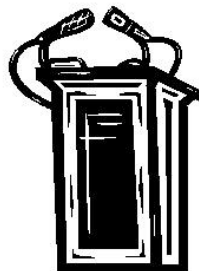
Charles Washington's Operations 2 management team assembled its nightshift employees in order to issue a new edict, and the result was the briefest briefing yet.

Charles sent his deputy, Department 3 Chief **Dago Gonzalez**, into the lion's den, and Deputy Dago exited soon after in lamblike fashion.

Employees were expecting an unveiling of the Adjustments Operation's latest grand scheme, in this case a consolidation of four nightshift teams down to three. To some, this plan represented a further scaling back of management's unwanted stepchild, the nightshift.

To NTEU, this pessimistic reading was dead on. Weeks earlier, Chapter 247 submitted negotiation proposals to management that envisioned expanding the nightshift. Although previously in the season Austin Accounts Management complained that they needed more telephone coverage during late afternoon and early evening hours, they were unwilling to discuss NTEU's prescription to deal with exactly that situation.

Chapter 247 proposed surveying all dayshift Accounts Management employees for volunteers to move to a nightshift Tour Of Duty. Many of the seasonal employees had been



6:08 PM

forcibly transplanted to the dayshift on their return from furlough a few years ago. Since most had phone training, and all could work CIS cases, moving them to later TODs would increase late afternoon and early evening phone coverage while leaving plenty of time to tackle AM's inventory needs. Those returning to the nightshift would do so voluntarily. If there was a surplus of volunteers, conflicts would be resolved by Enter On Duty date.

These proposals were a little too challenging for management, however. They held fast to their original plan to reassign nightshift employees based on "skills." "Which skills?" NTEU asked. "The nightshift employees have identical skills." There were too many skills to name, according to Deputy Dago in management's official briefing to the union. When it comes to thinking fast on their feet, AM's management crew are no Algonquin Round Table. Charles' team **couldn't name one skill** on which their reassignment of CSRs was based.

Ops 2 management determined that they would set the criteria by which employees would be reassigned or not reassigned, and they would keep that criteria secret from NTEU and the employees.

The problem with their policy of "Don't ask, don't tell," however, was that Article 15 of the National Agreement instructs management exactly how to reassign and realign employees, but Charles' team seemed to be taking its cues from reading Louis L'Amour's tales of the Wild West instead of from reading the contract.

According to Article 15, when a reassignment/realignment of employees takes place, the Employer will:

1. Notify the Union.
2. Designate the impacted employees and solicit for volunteers.
3. If there are more volunteers than needed, the employee(s) with the earliest IRS EOD will get first choice.
4. Where there are not enough volunteers, the least senior employee(s) will be assigned.
5. The designated employees will receive five workdays notice.
6. The Union reserves the right to bargain.

After notifying the Union, none of these procedures were followed. Even if NTEU had chosen not to negotiate, as number 6 guarantees the union the right to do, management was bound to follow the first five contract provisions.

Ops 2 was **out there again**, flying high and rudderless, impervious to law or logic. "Follow the law," NTEU demanded of Charles Washington after the Toll Free TODs arbitration decision, but Austin Accounts Management functions in a perpetual state of lawlessness.

After refusing to negotiate with the chapter, Deputy Dago met with the night employees. He announced that management was rolling out a consolidation of four nightshift teams down to three, and advised them to get the details from their managers.

(Continued on next page)

DEPUTY DAGO BRIEFS EMPLOYEES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

He refused to answer questions from both employees and the union, then undertook a series of attempts to leave the room. The commotion caused by his repeated efforts to exit actually delayed his escape by several minutes, but he finally made his getaway, relinquishing his podium to nightshift managers, most of whom appeared not to have been fully briefed over management's scheme. When employees asked their team leaders what reassignments had been made, the managers told them that they did not have that information.

To say that employees were incredulous and disturbed by Dago's behavior would not be an exaggeration.

Chapter President **Eddie Walker** wrote Charles, "The employees were offended that you sent a management official to represent you who had not prepared for the meeting. Chapter 247 has attended its share of employee briefings, and **we have never seen a manager less prepared and less professional.**"

Eddie suggested that Charles or Dago's direct supervisor, Operation 2 Chief **Anna Medlock**, pay a visit to the nightshift and apologize. The answer: "Dago has always treated employees with respect and has consistently demonstrated the highest professional behavior. We support him 100%."

Chapter 247 has given a name to AM's strange compulsion to wrangle needlessly over all issues, great and small, and to infuriate and confuse as many employees as possible. We call it "**Mad Cowboy Disease.**"

DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING EMPLOYEES SEEK FAIR TREATMENT



The Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Government National Training Conference, held May 9-11, 2005, at George Washington University in Washington D.C., focused on the needs of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in government. It examined the employment, advancement, retention, and culture of Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees of the government, as well as among hearing employees. The conference also searched for ways to foster communication among hearing and Deaf individuals, despite different communication modes, such as sign language, lip reading, or spoken English.

While the government is obliged to provide reasonable accommodation for Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees, there is a need for hearing employees, whether management or coworkers, to go beyond basic needs and reach out to their coworkers.

Training for Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees is often inadequate. When interpreters are requested, sometimes they are told that there is no money in the budget to support interpreters or that a staff interpreter will be selected for them. Since there is such a wide range of needs among Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees, simply picking the next staff interpreter in line may not meet the

needs of all employees. If the interpretation is not suited for the employees, they do not receive the full benefit of training and may never be able to catch up. The interpreter must be qualified to deal with the needs of the employees.

When Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees reach out to hearing coworkers, they are sometimes shut out and isolated, simply because the hearing employees feel uncomfortable and do not know how to communicate with their colleagues. When they are asked questions, often the answer they give is the simplest, most basic answer, which does not allow the employee asking the question to learn from his or her peers, as other employees do. Hearing employees may also be reluctant to include Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees in their conversations and friendships, because it takes more effort and it is outside of their comfort zone.

All Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees want is respect and the support and training they need to do the best and most effective jobs, which they are fully capable of doing. The National Training Conference offered a forum for employees to share constructive ideas on how those needs can best be met.

To find out more information, visit the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Government website at www.dhbig.org/ntc. They have invaluable information and links on the site which will prove useful to all employees.

THE WOLF IS AT THE DOOR

Accounts Management Probationary Employees Are Targeted



Nature can be cruel. Wolf packs go after the weakest animals and cull them from the herd without mercy, tearing out their throats. The wolf pack continually fights among itself to see who will take the dominant position by sheer exercise of force. These mechanisms reduce survival to the lowest common denominator, because that is the only method available to the lower orders.

Fortunately, humanity has evolved past that dog eat dog stage and we have formed civilizations in which great achievements are reached because knowledge is passed on from one generation to the next, with greater amounts of time being devoted to teaching increasingly complex and technical knowledge to the benefit of all.

Unfortunately, the muckamucks in Accounts Management have not received the memo that tactics have changed. Training for new hires flows through **Anna Medlock's** Adjustments Operation 2, where management seems to feel that the best method of teaching complex information is to overload newbies with jargon, throw them onto the floor with little or no assistance, and penalize them when they make mistakes. After all, if a subject was covered in class for a full five minutes three months

ago, the employee should have complete command of this information. Employees are told if they ask questions of their work-leaders, they are showing they have not learned everything they need to know to keep them fully successful in their jobs. But if they get the information wrong, they are in danger of losing their jobs. And many newly hired people have lost their jobs.

Management's ingenious plan is to get rid of any probationers who are not performing as well as seasoned veterans ASAP. Rather than offer assistance to struggling employees, they are given token help. Some managers consider going over error reports with employees to be assistance. Others have given employees time with On the Job Instructors who were actually on phone duty during the time they were supposed to be assisting the employee. Some probationers were terminated as soon as two weeks after they came out of class.

"Chapter 247 has formed a task force for probationary employees who are targeted, shielding them from predatory management practices. If an employee needs help, they should see NTEU ASAP."

Adjustments is difficult in the best of times, covering a vast amount of information, which can change, change back again, and then change yet again with a bewildering regularity. The learning curve which has always been in place is apparently now a thing of the past.

Considering the huge investment

of time and money put into the training of these employees, management's attitude makes less than no sense. ***Firing an employee should be a last resort, not a business plan.***

There were 107 new hires who started in the Adjustments training class in October of 2004. ***Less than half of that number remain at the end of the season.*** There is an old maxim in school that if a few students fail a course, it is the fault of the students, but if the majority of the class fails, the fault lies with the teacher—or in this case, the Principal.

Probationers have fewer protections under the law and under the contract than perms. It is frighteningly easy for management to terminate them. It is management's responsibility—according to the contract and to its own business plan—to treat them fairly, to train them, and to support them so that they can learn a very difficult, ever changing job.

Instead, NTEU Chapter 247 has been forced to step into the breach, forming a task force for probationary employees and shielding them from predatory management practices. Sometimes NTEU succeeds, and other times it fails, to stop management from making a meal out of new hire employees.

Paradoxically, management claims they are in desperate need of new employees, especially in Toll Free, where probationers have been directed in recent seasons. Firing newly hired employees so they don't bring down upper management's national statistics while they are learning is not acceptable performance on management's part. In fact, Chapter 247 gives the Accounts Management team a failing mark.

Enough, already!

AM's Amazing Charles Washington: The Longest Disappearing Act In Showbiz?

Now that Accounts Management's seasonal workforce is getting its traditional "What's your hurry? Here's your hat. Let's have that badge while you're at it" shove out the revolving door, it's probably a good time to look ahead toward the rest of our lives...or at least to the next season.

Director Charles Washington has been keeping a lower profile than usual. Considering the cacophony of murmuring and soft cursing from his increasingly resentful employees, that's probably a wise policy...perhaps the only one his leadership has concocted during this season of discontent.

"The [Accounts Management] blueprint includes more blanket 'leave denial days,' and calls for forcing returning seasonals into 10:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Tours Of Duty."

The promise of a June 30, 2005, departure for our esteemed director turned to ashes of deeply disappointing acridness for long suffering employees, but sources at the highest level of management have confirmed that **January 2006 will bring the end of the reign of Good King Charles I.** Not, sadly, before "The Legacy" can be passed on to the next season.

According to our sources, Charles' plans for 2006 will survive him. **The blueprint includes more blanket "leave denial days," and calls for forcing returning seasonals into 10:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Tours Of Duty.**

Chapter 247's offer to work together with Charles and his team to alleviate the forthcoming employee hardships was rejected. The visionary executive appears to be stumbling to his own drummer again.

NTEU's mass grievance over Accounts Management's leave denial is proceeding inexorably toward arbitration. When it comes to leave for the past season, Austin's AM operations are in a class by themselves. According to our

research, no other site denies 100% of leave—for **every** employee, **regardless of the number of calls or the amount of inventory**—on so many days, including spring break week and Good Friday.

It is the belief of Chapter 247's leadership that Austin's top AM management is interested in advancing its reputation as a "can do" team on the backs of its employees, to the detriment of the employees' family lives. Such management will eventually lead to killing the goose that is the real key to Austin's golden reputation.

2006 is shaping up as another year that **Accounts Management will feel the arbitrator's lash**, due to its compulsive and insensitive attempts to control everyone and everything in its path. Another season of cruel, self-absorbed, obtuse management is too much. NTEU, for its part, is ready to move on.

WHY RETIRE IN JANUARY? *Let Me Think...*

Mike Causey's Federal Report of July 25 offered important advice for what he calls "high-paid feds." Listen to Mike.

"If you are planning a December or **January** departure, timing is important. Picking the best day permits you to carry over the maximum amount of annual leave, and to be paid for **most** of that leave at the new, higher (2005 pay) levels. That would make the most of your unused annual leave, worth either 2.3 percent or 3.1 percent. For some high-paid feds with lots of leave, that means **tens of thousands of extra dollars**, just for picking the best day to retire. Also, by leaving at the right time, the higher-value annual leave won't be taxable for 2005."

If there are any **high-paid feds** out there, this upcoming January might be a better time to retire than say...June 2005.

DID YOU KNOW...



You have 15 **workdays** to file a grievance, once you become aware of a grievable issue? After that, the right to file is lost! (Some exceptions apply.) See your NTEU steward. **National Agreement, Article 41, Section 7.**

STATE OF THE UNION III: "REVERSAL OF FORTUNE"

Eddie Walker Chapter 247 PRESIDENT

The state of our union is sound. NTEU Chapter 247 is larger, stronger, and more effective than at any time in our history. Our stewards are better trained and more determined than ever before. Our members are more involved and more confident of the ability of their union to have a positive impact in the workplace.

At a time when federal employees and federal employee unions are under attack, Chapter 247 is thriving. Our once sleepy little chapter has fought the powers that be, and we have experienced a stunning *reversal of fortune*.

"First they ignore you."

Three years ago, when the current chapter team was elected to office, management was disinterested in working with 247, as opposed to *working us*. They expected that we would be co-opted and roll over, or that we would get mad and go away, or that we were never really serious to begin with. They did not believe that we *could* keep our campaign promises—they probably didn't even believe that we were interested in keeping them. They had no idea how far we were willing to go to succeed against odds that we knew going in were possibly insurmountable.

Those first days were a challenge. Our job was to carry the boulder up the hill, knowing that there was an excellent chance that we would be back at the bottom by the end of the day. Management believed that we could not figure out how the game was played. They believed that they alone knew the rules, and that the union had no choice but to follow *their* rules. They believed that we would remain irrelevant.

"Then they laugh at you."

The new Chapter 247 leadership rejected the notion that we were left to rely on the small kindnesses of management, and that it was somehow rude or "bad form" to fight for the rights of employees. Our first instinct was to settle disputes the easy way; if that didn't achieve results, we didn't hesitate to move on to Plan B.

We resisted management's attempts to maneuver us into negotiating our local Alternative Work Schedules agreements out of existence. Instead, we stuck by our guns, through the arbi-

tration process; through management's unsuccessful appeal to the Federal Labor Relations Authority; through the Accounts Management Director's failed efforts to resist implementation; and through management's harassment and union busting tactics.

"Then they fight you."

The chapter's most important actions were those we took to build support among employees and boost membership. We increased the flow of information to employees. If management insisted on behaving badly, we exposed their actions to our members, through our newsletter and through flyers, posters, and even video. We reintroduced informational picketing to the Austin Campus. As Justice Brandeis expressed it, "Publicity is justly commended as a remedy for social and industrial diseases. Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants; electric light the most efficient policeman."

"Then you win."

With the return of Toll Free employees to their original, early morning Tours Of Duty, and the comeback of the ACS nightshift, Chapter 247 achieved what it set out to do: to prove that a determined, steady group of individuals with a common interest can join together to fight City Hall and win. When that happened, we truly turned our world around.

We, as a chapter, have moved beyond cynicism and established a model for future action. When NTEU refused to go away, management eventually discovered a way to work with us. We have more cooperation with more campus operations than we have had since the unfortunate, unilateral announcement in 2001 of the "death" of partnership between the IRS and NTEU. And as for those in management who continue to ignore the needs of employees—and the input of the employees' representative, NTEU—it's time for them to *get out of the way*.

When we had little else, 247 took solace from Gandhi's quotes above. They lay out the traditional stages of opposition from those in power when they face those who seek to defend human rights and diminish injustice. Here, on this spot, Chapter 247 will continue to stand up for employee interests, big or small.

CHAPTER 247 OFFICERS

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Eddie Walker

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PRESIDENT**
Julia Miller

**FIRST VICE
PRESIDENT**
Russell Bokelman

TREASURER
Karen Lorch

SECRETARY
Tonia Gilmore

CHIEF STEWARDS
Ben Eureste (Days)
X0833
Steve Conyers (Nights)
X0180

STEWARDS

DEBRA BROWN X1714
MIKE BUNTON X5732
ROBIN CHERRY X1361
MONICA CAHILL X5414
JULIAN CHITTA X1930
DAVE DAVIS X0253
CALEB ELLINGER X1106
ARLENE FLORES X5466
JIM HARDY X1802
TONYA JONES X0892
SAL MACIAS X1058
LADAN MAKKOUK X1549
BLAS MARTINEZ X5370
KARINA OROZCO X1638
MARY SUE QUIROZ X1078
ALISON RIGGS X5476
CHARLIE RODRIGUEZ X5327
GINNY ROJAS X0017
JIM SHELTON X1602
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