

REPORT OF THE NVP FOR IRB

For the period from October 15, 2018 to April 4, 2019

by Marco Angeli

2019 marks the 30th anniversary of the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), the largest independent administrative tribunal in Canada, comprised of four Divisions: the Refugee Protection Division (RPD), the Refugee Appeal Division (RAD), the Immigration Division (ID), and the Immigration Appeal Division (IAD).

While the IRB had approximately 1,000 employees across the country for a number of years, as of March 31st, 2019 this number raised up to nearly 1,500, including Governor in Council (GIC) appointees, with the ramp up the additional funding earmarked in the federal Budget 2018 has permitted. Of course, these additional resources had the expectations in terms of productivity go up exponentially too. In his message regarding end of Fiscal Year 2018-2019, the IRB Chairperson Richard Wex highlighted the following accomplishments with the staff:

- The RPD has not only been able to slow the growth of the inventory and wait times, but has also exceeded its performance target of 32,000 refugee claim decisions for the year;
- The RAD ended the year with a full complement of decision-makers (GIC's) for the first time since its inception in 2013 and has also achieved its ambitious target of finalizing 5,200 appeals;
- The ID has entered a new era with the release of the new Chairperson's Guideline on Detention, following the findings and recommendations of last year's external review;
- The IAD has been successful in eliminating its backlog of pending immigration appeals after more than a decade and is now committed to a 12-month processing service standard for appeals filed after April 1, 2019.

The enormous figures cited above and the record number of refugee claim referrals at the RPD and appeals to the RAD, are contributing factors explaining greater public, media and parliamentary interest in the IRB.

Of course, many human-related issues have emerged along this course: staffing (use and abuse of non-advertised processes and other excesses or abuses), employee turnover, demotivation, workload stress, burnout, misuse and abuse of performance management and discipline.

Mr. Wex was appointed Chairperson of the IRB in July 2018, but it took four months before Eddy, Crystal, and I were invited to a meet and greet with him. During the exchange we had, the Chairperson told us about his objectives, focusing on the increase in the general productivity of the IRB first, and the problems related to the Phoenix pay system. I talked about the importance of not neglecting the human factor, that despite the importance of metrics, the person should remain at the center of all management decisions.

Our National President, Brother Eddy is now taking over the co-chairmanship of the National Labour Management Consultation Committee (NLMCC) to standardize CEIU representation in all three Departments. As a member of the NLMCC present in the workplace, this will allow me to focus on the issues on the ground and I will be able to discuss them more in depth at the table.

In this regard, I travelled to the IRB offices in Montreal (two locations now, with the Integrated Claim Analysis Centre (ICAC) and part of the staff that moved from the Guy-Favreau Complex to the 715 Peel Street building) in November 2018, and with our NEVP, Sister Crystal last March 20th to meet with the Board Members (decision-makers PM-06), to hear from them the specific issues they have, their concerns and expectations from their union. This meeting was the first of a national tour launched following a cry for help and support from these PM-06's. Toronto, NHQ and Vancouver are next.

Mental Health (MH) in the workplace is of course at the heart of the concerns of our members at the IRB. The work of the new Joint Sub-Committee (JSC) on MH has continued since the completion of the Guarding Minds @ Work survey to develop an action plan. JSC members participated in the Joint Learning Program (JLP) workshop on MH, and they have received training on the Canadian Labour Code (CLC) Part II tailored to their role, as well as on Equity Employment (EE), Duty to Accommodate (DTA), and decisions by consensus. A presentation of the accomplishments and the next steps has been provided to the Executive Management Board (EMB) of the IRB, which is at the request of the Chairperson who is following the progress done with great interest.

On the workload, targets and productivity, staffing issues, I am having various forums of discussion with senior management where I bring requests and suggestions from our members on a regular basis, although a change of culture is a long-term job. I am attaching to this report a position developed and adopted by the Montreal Local (10459) on staffing and the use of non-advertised processes. I have also approached my colleagues representing other bargaining agents (CAPE, PIPSC, ACFO, AJJ) to improve the working conditions of IRB employees as a whole.

At the National Headquarters (NHQ), I have started touring the workplace to recruit members for the Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) Committee and actively participated in the planning and activities of the International Women's Day (IWD 2019), and the 30th Anniversary of the IRB for a better visibility of the union and to revive Local 70701 (IRB NHQ).

Finally, as I had mentioned in my last report that I had been declared affected on April 11, 2018, along with four other CEIU members and two members of another bargaining unit, I am happy to mention that we no longer have a Workforce Adjustment (WFA) situation, as we have all been deployed or obtained a new position at the IRB. Personally, my position is still within the PA group and therefore a member in good standing of CEIU.

In Solidarity,

Marco Angeli
National Vice President (NVP) for the IRB