



# **On The Move**

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## **WHILE TOP MANAGEMENT WANTS PEACE AND HARMONY, OPERATING MANAGERS DISH OUT CRUEL AND UNUSUAL PUNISHMENT**

A few weeks ago, TWU President Willie Brown met with top SEPTA management to discuss the Authority's proposals to promote peace and harmony between labor and management around the Authority. SEPTA proposed the joint sponsorship of one or more big events, paid for by the Authority, to bring the two sides together. They talked about a holiday get together, a summer picnic, and kicked around other possible events. SEPTA's commitment to these efforts seemed real enough, but it is difficult for the Union to take top management's talk of "peace and harmony" seriously while the Authority's operating managers are allowed to wage war on our members and subject them to cruel and unusual punishment whenever the opportunity arises. Cruel and unusual punishment? We do not exaggerate. Take the stations operations managerial crew for example.

### **Cashier fired while facing life threatening medical condition**

On October 6, 2014, the Authority's Medical Department instructed Cashier Michael Isreal to bring medical documentation of his condition to a November 7, 2014 appointment, even though the Authority knew Isreal had a serious medical problem and had previously supplied them with extensive documentation--on August 21, 2014 and again on October 6, 2014. However, on October 30, 2014, just one week prior to his November 7 appointment, Isreal began treatment at the Moss Rehab in Elkins Park. As a result, he couldn't get the updated medical documentation SEPTA wanted in time for the November 7 appointment. Still, he produced the documentation just *one week later*. SEPTA Medical was okay with the short delay, but not the operating managers overseeing the cashier's group (we use the term "overseer" literally).

On November 12, 2014, Stacey Richardson, the Assistant Director for Stations, notified Isreal that he had been dropped from the rolls of the Authority (terminated), because he failed to bring "documentation to substantiate his inability to resume his normal duties." While Richardson notified Isreal of his termination, Darryl Wade, the Director of Stations, had his fingerprints all over the decision to fire Isreal. As soon as he was dropped, Isreal lost his medical and prescription benefits. He couldn't get desperately needed pain medication or medical treatment, so his condition worsened, threatening his life and limb. However, none of this mattered to Wade or Richardson. The Union promptly filed the case for arbitration when the Authority denied Isreal's grievance. Soon after, the Union secured Isreal's reinstatement thanks to the consideration given the case by a member of the Authority's labor relations staff who recognized the urgency of the

matter and the difficulty SEPTA would have winning the case in arbitration. Isreal's benefits were immediately restored along with his medical treatment, but Isreal's story could have had a very unhappy ending.

This is just one example of the cruel and unusual punishment meted out by SEPTA's stations' management. Unfortunately, there are examples of down-right incompetence as well.

## **Cashier managers are mathematically challenged**

We don't want to pick on the cashier bosses, but the cashiers handle the money, so their managers should at least be able to count, don't you think? But they can't.

Wade and Richardson frequently mess up the cashiers' pay schedules. In addition, a cashier recently got fired over his attendance points, but when the Union reviewed his record, it became obvious that management got the math all wrong. While the bosses took action against the cashier for allegedly going over the 20 point threshold, the Union's audit revealed that he had only 19 points. The Union pointed out the source of the discrepancy to management, but Wade and Richardson still couldn't do the math. It took many weeks of repeated conversations to finally get them to see the error of their ways. The Union won the cashier's reinstatement with over \$6,700 in back pay, but the employee involved never should have been fired in the first place. If this were the private sector, Wade and Richardson would be long gone, along with their boss Mike Kolesnik, but at SEPTA they don't even get a slap on the wrist, let alone on the head where it is most deserved.

## **Piling on rule violations in effort to make discipline stick**

"Throw the book at him." That's the philosophy practiced by many location managers all over the property. As a result, it is quite common these days to see simple incidents of wrongdoing being blown all out of proportion with the addition of an endless list of "rule violations" and disciplinary charges piled on to a single unremarkable event. Take the driver who has an accident for example. Assume it's properly classified as a chargeable accident, which warrants a written warning at most. Yet, when a notice of investigation is issued, the accident is examined through a video microscope and the employee is charged with multiple rule violations in addition to the chargeable accident---BDR this, BDR that. In some cases, the employee gets fired as a result, only to be returned to work in the grievance procedure or in arbitration, if SEPTA doesn't come to its senses in time.

Unfortunately, unwarranted and unjust discipline is a fact of life at SEPTA, because of incompetence, arrogance and the disrespect displayed by SEPTA's operating managers. That's why the Union has to do a double take whenever top management talks about "peace and harmony" between the parties. Instead of coming to the Union with proposals for "feel good events," the Authority should undertake a serious campaign to rein in those managers who see their life's work as firing as many employees as possible regardless of the circumstances. Were top management to start such a campaign, in earnest, the Union would be glad to work with the Authority to sponsor activities and events that could bring the two sides closer together.

# **SEPTA Needs to Rein in the Abuse of Power**