



# *On The Move*

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## **Unfair Labor Practice Charges Filed over Video Surveillance Cameras Placed in Comly Transportation Room**

The battle over the use of video surveillance cameras on SEPTA property erupted again at Comly Depot when the Authority communicated its intent to activate Comly's video cameras on February 23, 2015 *to monitor the activities of Union members* in Comly's Transportation Room, without first bargaining with the union.

In response, Local 234 has filed Unfair Labor Practice charges against SEPTA, challenging the discriminatory, anti-union motive for conducting video surveillance of union members only, while refusing to engage in surveillance behind the dispatcher's window, where computers and confidential employee payroll and medical files are located and susceptible to theft.

### **SEPTA's Surveillance Policies are a Product of Its Class Biased Beliefs**

SEPTA's use of video surveillance cameras exposes the Authority's bias against union employees, while allowing management to get off the hook, scot free. (The same bias impacts the problem of pension inequality). Ironically, there is more reason to track SEPTA's managers than there is to voyeuristically observe bus operators on their breaks in the Transportation Room.

- Operators who attempt to contact control center in an emergency, all too often have to wait for hours to get a response. Placing surveillance cameras in the Control Center would help put a fire under the controllers to do a better job.

- Managers in the Benefits Department are often "out to lunch" when you need assistance. At least that's the way it appears when all you ever get is a pre-recorded message to leave a message, a message that rarely gets returned. Surveillance cameras and the use of the VMIS system would improve the productivity of SEPTA's benefits representatives.

- Body cameras would be a wonderful innovation for all District Directors and Senior Directors. That way, the whereabouts of these characters can be tracked and action taken for "theft of Authority funds" when they get caught goofing off during the work day (a rather common occurrence, especially when you consider endless meetings a form of "goofing off").

- Using recording devices to verify dispatcher conversations with operators who call-in for work is long overdue. Dispatchers are notorious for saying one thing over the phone and another

when you appear at the window. Control Center conversations are recorded, dispatchers deserve equal treatment.

- A manager reported a computer got stolen from his office at Woodland Shop. SEPTA responded by placing more than twenty cameras on the shop floor, but none in the managers' offices where the computer equipment is located! This makes no sense, unless your goal is to find an excuse to spy on the workforce.

- Finally, high tech equipment is sorely needed to monitor SEPTA's labor relations managers. These folks have mastered the art of "boiler-plate" grievance answers. In other words, they answer every grievance with a boilerplate...denied. With all of these denials, the labor relations managers have a lot of spare time on their hands. We know they leave early most days, but surveillance cameras could provide real evidence of ducking off during the work day---a problem that definitely calls for an investigation by the Governor's Auditor General.

Despite all of the problems on the management side, SEPTA's big wigs are unwilling to expand the Authority's video surveillance program into management's world.

### **Cameras in an Employee Break Room are Prying and Entirely Unnecessary**

Instead of putting its lens on management, SEPTA has decided to activate surveillance cameras in a non-work area of Comly Depot, where operators and other employees eat lunch, read the newspaper, watch TV and engage in meetings and conversations relating to matters of concern to the Union. Meanwhile, the dispatchers' area is left out of sight of the camera's lens. Moreover, as SEPTA knows, the Transportation Room is one of the few places on Authority property where employees have some reasonable expectation of privacy. As a result, the placement of the cameras in the Comly Transportation Room is a mandatory subject of bargaining with the Union.

When the cameras at Comly were first installed back in October, 2014, the Union took up the issue with SEPTA's Labor Relations Department. At that time, Local 234 President Willie Brown and SEPTA's Labor Relations Chief Officer, Stephanie Deiger, reached an agreement to turn the cameras off, unless developments at the depot proved it necessary to revisit the issue. The Union also reserved its right to file unfair labor practice charges against SEPTA, if the Authority decided to activate the cameras without first negotiating with the Union.

According to SEPTA, the decision to activate the cameras came after the Authority received a number of complaints *from operators* about the theft of personal property. The Local has been unable to verify any such complaints and some suspect that the reports of theft may have been made-up as a ploy to verify that the cameras were actually turned off. If that's what happened, the ploy backfired against the members of Comly Depot.

In any event, SEPTA has failed to assert any reasonable justification for activating the cameras in Comly's Transportation Room and has failed to first *bargain* with the Union over the use of cameras in a non-work area. That's why the Local has filed Unfair Labor Practice charges against SEPTA with other forms of action are under consideration.

**TWU LOCAL 234, WE MUST AND WE WILL**