

I dissent from the Arbitration Award issued by the arbitration panel with Richard Dissen as its neutral arbitrator for the contract between Butler County and the Court-Appointed Probation Officers.

This award is an example of why the legislative enactment allowing for interest arbitration of public employee collective bargaining agreements is a failure and needs to be reformed. That system is premised on the idea that there would be a cadre of experienced and learned labor arbitrators evaluating cases in an unbiased way based on the merits of the record presented to them. It depends on the notion that good and learned people will do responsible things. The reality has been somewhat different. A system in which the neutral arbitrator is selected by the advocates too often leads to results that have nothing to do with the record presented and more to do with the arbitrator's concern with being selected again in the future.

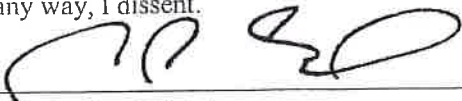
It is not difficult in today's world to find headlines about governments being shut down or significantly disrupted due to the need for reforms of public employee pay and benefits systems that are bankrupting their communities. Anyone who wants to know how governments get themselves into such calamities would find instruction in the job done here by the board of arbitrators. Irresponsibility of this type is the stuff those later crises are made of.

The Butler County probation officers are professional and valuable employees and they deserve fair wages and good benefits. But they were already among the most highly-paid county employees in Pennsylvania. Their wage and benefit package far exceeds what is available to the average hourly worker in their community and also exceeds every other County employee in an apples-to-apples comparison. To be clear: These are employees whose base pay exceeds \$26.00 per hour, who have nearly-free health insurance, a taxpayer-guaranteed pension plan and who enjoy about a month's paid time off each year. There is no basis in the record presented to Mr. Dissen that supports the wage and benefit improvements included in this award.

To the contrary, every other union-represented rank and file employee in Butler County has just recently accepted the creation of a new, lower wage and benefit tier for newly-hired employees. They and their unions all acknowledged that their pay and benefits are so good, that taking some of the pressure off of taxpayers in the future makes sense. This was an example of unions and local government working together, amicably and responsibly, to protect workers while also making the communities they serve stronger for the future. Those employees and their unions deserve credit for responsible compromise and the taxpayers should be proud of them and the elected officials who facilitated those deals.

The board of arbitrators nevertheless has now exempted this one group of employees from that voluntarily-agreed to trend that applies to all the others. On top of that, it gave these employees bigger raises than those given to all the other employees in the County, is allowing them to pay less for health insurance deductibles than the rest, and has included unnecessary and unprecedented structural increases in their contract not available to the other employees as well. This damages the County, its taxpayers, the other unions that participated in the responsible compromises, and the other employees. In short, it just makes everything worse. There is no legitimate basis or justification in the record for this level of irresponsibility.

Because there is no rational basis for this award in the record presented to the neutral arbitrator at the hearing and no legitimate basis from any source that matches the purpose of interest arbitration under the law in any way, I dissent.

  
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Christopher Gabriel

~~December 30, 2019~~

January 10, 2020