



REVIEW COMMITTEE

7.1: Discharge of Gas Service Rep. for "curbing" multiple change party tags. Sets precedence for several classifications in physical book.



IBEW

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**CASE CLOSED
FILED & LOGGED**

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R.W. STALCUP, SECRETARY

MARGARET A. SHORT, CHAIRMAN

- ☐ DECISION
- ☐ LETTER DECISION
- ☐ PRE-REVIEW REFERRAL

Review Committee File No. 1790
Diablo Division Case No. CON-95-27

Subject of the Grievance

This case concerns the discharge of a long service Gas Service Representative for curbing change of party meter reads.

Facts of the Case

On April 11, 1995, the Service Supervisor was approached by Customer Services clerk regarding numerous misreads from Gas Service. The supervisor asked the clerk to pull a sample of the inaccurate tags for his review. The clerk gave the supervisor eight incorrect tags, all of which had been worked by the grievant. All eight were change party tags.

The supervisor then met with the grievant to investigate. The grievant admitted to guessing at the reads. Continued discussion was put off until a Shop Steward was available. During the interim, 11 more change party tags were found for a total of 19. No further attempt was made to identify additional incorrect tags worked by the grievant. The 19 meters were reread, and in most instances the reread was lower than the original read submitted by the grievant.

The grievant had 21 years Service and had been a Serviceman for 17 years. He, the grievant, had no active discipline at the time of the incidence addressed in this case.

During two investigatory interviews, the grievant admitted he never went to the meters to read them so as to extend the time for lunch and breaks to read the newspaper and take naps; that he had been doing this for a couple of months. At the LIC, the grievant stated the reason for extending his lunch and break time was related to an alcohol problem he had and that often he was suffering from a hangover during the work day, although he denied drinking during regular work hours.

Discussion

The Union opined that curbing is not a term that is familiar to gas service personnel, that they receive training on the importance of not falsifying tags and that Standard Practice 851-2, Use of Multipurpose Customer Service Orders, reads: "Employees shall not falsify information on any order they issue or complete. Falsification is cause for disciplinary action and/or dismissal." The Union stated that Gas Service Representatives do not know that falsifying a meter read (guessing or estimating the read) is grounds for immediate discharge like Meter Readers know and further that curbing is a term that has only been used with Meter Readers.

Union also stated that Meter Readers are generally given a package of work rules, in which curbing, estimating, or guessing at a meter read is specifically described as a dischargeable offense, even for a single instance. Gas Service Representatives, as well as a host of other classifications in the Physical Bargaining Unit who regularly or occasionally must record meter reads, are not provided with such specific admonishments. Further, Union pointed out that not all meter reads recorded by Gas Service Representatives are entered into the Company's billing records system, and as such never result in a customer receiving a billing based on that incorrect read. Union is of the opinion that discharge occurs for Meter Readers who curb read a meter because all meter reads taken by Meter Readers are entered into the customer billing system and all incorrect reads have the potential of generating a customer complaint followed by a re-read, rebilling and possible rebate to the customer.

The Company opined that the consequence of recording an incorrect read is the same regardless of who or what classification does it. An incorrect read results in an incorrect customer billing and additional work as the meter must be reread and the customer rebilled. When a read is taken from the field, the completed tag goes to the Customer Services department where the re-entry clerk enters the read into the computer. If the read is incorrect or out of the normal range for the average for that account, a rejection note will flash up and the clerk can no longer proceed. At that point, the tag poster will need to investigate and attempt to identify the problem by looking up the gas and electric usage history; the tag will need to be refiled to ascertain the correct read, and then the tag is returned to the tag poster who then has to adjust the customer's bill, issue a rebate where applicable, issue a new commencing bill, and process a memo to General Office for each misread.

The Company cited Paragraph IIIA of the Positive Discipline Agreement which states:

"Termination may also occur in those few instances when a single offense of such major consequence is committed that the employee forfeits his/her right to the Positive Discipline process, such as:"

Theft (See Review Committee Decisions 1451 and 1452)
Striking a member of the public
Energy Diversion
Curb reading of meters

The committee also reviewed a number of arbitration and lower level grievance decisions upholding the discharge of Meter Readers for entering false meter reads, even on a single meter.

The Review Committee discussed at great length the seriousness of entering false meter reads. The Review Committee also discussed other classifications who frequently have assignments involving the reading of meters, where such reads are entered into the customer billing system. It was agreed that Company needs to better communicate the consequence of recording falsified meter reads.

DECISION

In the course of discussion of this case, Union argued strongly that discharging a Gas Service Representative for recording an estimated read was unjust primarily because Company had not clearly communicated to employees in this classification that such a penalty may be applied. In this case, however, Union conceded that the grievant admitted to estimating all the change party tags he worked for approximately two months, likely considerably more than the 19 instances identified. The grievant also admitted to deliberately falsifying Company records and misuse of paid work time. Based on the foregoing and for the reasons cited above, the Review Committee agreed that the discharge of the grievant was for just and sufficient cause.

Further the Review Committee agreed that this case sets precedence for the level of discipline, i.e. discharge, to be administered when employees in the following classifications enter false meter reads:

Meter Readers (Srs.)
Gas Service Reps (RGS, Relief Service Operator)
Electric Metering Technician Line of Progression
Troublemens

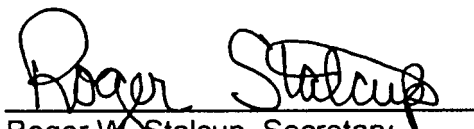
However, precedence for the future is contingent upon Company clearly communicating the definition of a curb reading of meters to the classifications listed above. This case is closed without adjustment.



Margaret A. Short, Chairman
Review Committee

3/21/96

Date



Roger W. Stalcup, Secretary
Review Committee

3/21/96

Date