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Judge Calls CNN Plan a 'Sham' to Get Rid of Union

Five years is a long time to wait for justice. For the 250 workers at the national television network CNN — fired and penalized because CNN was determined to use only non-union workers — the wait isn't over.

In late 2008, a National Labor Relations Board judge issued a scathing decision against the network and ordered that 110 fired workers be rehired, that the economic losses suffered by workers in the Washington, D.C., and New York bureaus be restored, and that CNN recognize the workers' union.

But there is no justice yet for fired workers as CNN appeals that ruling.

In 2003, CNN terminated its more than 20-year contract with Team Video Services, which employed union camera operators, broadcast engineers and other technicians for CNN, in effect, firing more than 110 workers.

The network claimed it would create its own unit of employees, but Judge Arthur J. Amchan called that plan a "sham," used to get rid of employees and their union. CNN's goal was to "achieve a nonunion technical work force in its Washington, D.C. and New York bureaus.

CNN's "widespread and egregious misconduct" showed a flagrant and general disregard for employees' fundamental rights," he said.

CNN's claims that we weren't able to learn new equipment were completely false," he said.

It was very stressful and difficult in the month leading up to the point when CNN began firing workers, he said. And it was clear that anyone associated with the union or providing representation to workers on the job wasn't going to be rehired into the new non-union workplace.

Suissa said the process was very disheartening because it took so long to resolve. "It's hard to find a job to replace the work I was doing, and I've been making less money over these past years," he said.

Sarah Pacheco joined CNN as a videographer and worked at the Washington bureau from 1990 to 2003. She also was a very active and aggressive union steward. Despite her extensive experience in non-linear editing, a skill CNN management claimed was necessary when it rejected other applicants, Pacheco was not rated among the top applicants. A "lack of people skills" described by management likely "is related to her aggressiveness as a union steward for Local 31," the judge wrote.

And the fight continues.



Jimmy Suissa worked for CNN for 17 years, starting as a camera man, but mastering nearly every technical job in the Washington bureau, from running the audio and video boards to technical director.

"Many of us rotated through these positions and that's why we knew that