

History
of the
U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Interviewee: George Bork

Interviewer: Ronald Ottes

Date: September 16, 2003

Place: Rockville, MD

DEED OF GIFT

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George Bork

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CASSETTE NUMBERS: 1

GENERAL TOPIC OF INTERVIEW: History of the Food and Drug Administration

DATE: September 16, 2003

PLACE: Rockville, MD

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INTERVIEWEE:

INTERVIEWER(S):

NAME: George Bork

NAME: Ronald Ottes

ADDRESS:

ADDRESS 5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

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Interview with George Bork

September 16, 2003

TAPE 1, SIDE A

This is another in a series of FDA oral history recordings. Today we're interviewing George Bork, Labor Relations Specialist, retiring from the Food and Drug Administration. George is being interviewed in his office in the Parklawn Building in Rockville, Maryland. The date is September 16, 2003. I am Ronald Ottes.

A transcription of this recording, together with the recorded tapes, will be placed in the National Library of Medicine and become a part of the oral history program.

Ronald Ottes: George, to begin this interview, would you give us a brief resume of where you were born and educated and any relevant work experience prior to coming to FDA.

George Bork: Okay, Ron. Actually I was born in western Pennsylvania and raised in a small town by the name of Ford City which was up the Allegheny River about 40 miles from Pittsburgh. I grew up there and, at the time I finished grade school, I went to the seminary, where I intended to study to become a Catholic priest. So I went to high school at a seminary through the two years of college at the seminary, and then I was transferred to St. Vincent's in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, for my third year of college. And finally I was transferred down to St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, where I completed my fourth year of college and where I also studied theology for two years at Roland Park in Baltimore.

Ottes: What was it?

Bork: Roland.

But I was still two years short of becoming a priest, and at that time was having some health problems, and I just had lost my enthusiasm to go on to the priesthood. So I left the seminary at that point. I went back to my home in Pennsylvania, and I stayed with my parents for a while. And during that time, I took the Federal Service Entrance Exam, and I passed that. As a result of that test, I got a couple of job offers. One was for the General Services Administration (GSA) in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, and the other one was down here in Washington, D.C., for the Federal Housing Administration (FHA).

Ottes: What was your degree in, George?

Bork: Well, I actually finished college with a degree, which was a major in philosophy. After my second year of theology, I got a bachelor's degree in theology also. So that was my background.

But, anyway, I decided to take the job offer in Washington, D.C., because I thought there'd be more job opportunities down here than in a little town like Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. So I came down to Washington in June of 1962 and began working for the FHA as a mortgage note accounts clerk, and that was a GS-5 position. What the FHA had done, they had taken a number of people who had passed the Federal Service Entrance Exam after college and put them in this GS-5 position. But I wasn't with FHA very long before I realized that I was in a dead-end position, and if I had stayed in that position maybe 20 years, I could have gone all the way up to a GS-6. So I don't know why they hired college graduates for that kind of position.

But, anyway, at that time, I began to look for other employment and during the time I had been in the seminary in Baltimore, I had made the acquaintance of a fellow who was a couple years older than I whose name was Jack Geraghty. And it so happens that when I was looking for a job, I realized that Jack Geraghty had left the seminary, he was also working for the government, and he was working for FDA. So I arranged to meet with him. We sat down and talked, and at the end of the interview, he offered me a job in his branch. He was the head of the Employee Relations Branch of the Division of Personnel

Management in FDA. And so, of course, I accepted the offer, and I just transferred at a lateral grade to FDA in February of 1963.

Ottes: That was Jack Geraghty?

Bork: Yes.

So I came to FDA and began to work for him. Even though I had worked for FHA for something like eight months, I was still pretty green in the government. When I first came to FDA, I started doing . .

At that time the Employee Relations Branch serviced all of FDA, both field and headquarters, and at that time we handled a number of programs, which since then have been sent out to the various other organizations. We handled the whole employee relations workload, everything from things like health benefits, life insurance, and workmen's compensation to things like the Incentive Awards Program, leave, outside activities, national interest, and, of course, discipline cases and adverse actions. I began to work in the Employee Relations Branch, and, as I said, I was pretty green at the time.

I remember we had these phones with different buttons on them, and one of the first times somebody called me, I pushed the wrong button and cut the person off because I didn't know how to put a call on hold at the time.

But, anyway, I started to do well.

Another interesting thing that pertained to me personally was, the month after I came to FDA, my father died, and there was just me, my mother, and my father. So my mother was left alone up in Pennsylvania. So after I came back from the funeral, I sat down with Jack Geraghty. During that time, I had been with FHA, I had taken the Federal Service Entrance Exam a second time, and I had qualified for a GS-7 position by taking that exam and getting a good enough score on it. When Jack learned that my father had died and I was qualified for a 7, he put in a promotion for me. So it then took about a month after coming to FDA, I was promoted to GS-7. And, of course, that started my progression in the government and with FDA.

Ottes: Did your mother move down here to Washington?

Bork: No, she never did. She stayed in Pennsylvania. I worked down here. Occasionally, I would go up there to visit her. There were just a couple of times she came down here to Washington.

Anyway, I continued to work and I did some of the easier, so-called easier programs as far as life insurance and health benefits. I found out even those had some complicated jobs connected with them. Like once I was responsible for transferring all of FDA's employees to a new health-plan system and this was shortly after I came to the agency. Well, nobody lost their health insurance coverage or anything.

Then I got into programs like the Incentive Awards Program. I worked for the agency Awards Committee. Shelby Grey, I remember, was one of the chairmen of the committee. Danny Banes also for a time was involved on the Awards Committee. In 1964, I was actually the person who arranged and coordinated the FDA Awards Ceremony.

So I started to work in all the employee relations programs.

Back in 1962, while I was still at FHA, President Kennedy had signed an Executive Order, which really began the Labor Relations Program in the federal government. It gave employees the right to form and join unions and to negotiate with management about their conditions of employment. And after – well, it was in the mid-60's before I really became aware of the program, because other people in Employee Relations were handling it. It was only in the mid-60's that I started getting involved in labor relations matters.

I do know that it was about 1966 that the first recognition was accorded to the Chicago District. The employees there formed an AFGE local, American Federation of Government Employees. In the following year, the Boston District employees got recognition for their district.

Ottes: Well, let me ask you, while we're talking about this, what is the procedure for a district, in this case, to negotiate a contract with the union? What has to take place? Does the union petition the agency, or is it the reverse, the agency petitions the union?

Bork: Well, that procedure has changed at different times during the years. In those early years, the program was under Executive Order. It was at the will of the president, really, and the president could make changes into it.

At first, labor relations programs were pretty much informal. There was a lot of consultation with unions, with management sitting down and just discussing things with the union, but going all the way to negotiations. The union got recognition at first from the agencies themselves, so the first recognition units were established by FDA managers agreeing to recognize a particular group of employees.

Ottes: Was that at headquarters, or was that at the local level, that the FDA managers had to agree to this?

Bork: It was basically at the local level. Like a district director could agree to a union being formed. In headquarters, there were a couple of very small recognition units established during that time, probably '67, '68, and one of those was what we called SPAL, the Special Pharmacological Animal Laboratory. Actually, two recognition units were established there, one for the professionals and nonprofessional employees of the laboratory, and then a second one, even smaller, for the animal caretakers who worked at the laboratory. At the time they were part of the Facilities Management Branch of the Division of General Services, which eventually reported to the assistant commissioner for administration. So even in headquarters, we had a couple of small recognition units established at that time.

Now, even before I personally became involved with the labor relations program, I did hear one interesting story of labor relations in the field. While I don't have personal knowledge of this, I heard of it, and later on I knew one of the individuals who had been involved in it.

It seemed that probably in the early '60s, a group of inspectors in Denver District had indicated they wanted to establish a union in that district, and at the same time, a particular manager – I think the field organization was called the Bureau of Field Administration at the time, BFA. Anyway, one of the

managers of the organization apparently was not in favor of this move by the employees. So this particular manager heard of the effort by employees to form a union. He was opposed to it, and what I heard was that, in very short notice, these eight individuals were reassigned to eight different districts in the Food and Drug Administration. And that ended the first attempt by FDA employees in the field to form a union.

Ottes: What do you suppose happened there? Were the investigators unhappy with the local management and they wanted to get union help, or . . .

Bork: I really don't know. I can only assume that the employees were aware of the program and they saw some benefit to sitting down, meeting with management, and maybe negotiating a few things, and they thought they'd take advantage of the program. But apparently that first attempt was not successful.

Ottes: Well, in order to get union recognition, though, wouldn't they have had to, those investigators, wouldn't they have had to have an election at the district level in order to get recognition back then, didn't they have to do that?

Bork: I don't think, in the early days, an election was necessary. I think they had to show that they were interested, and they had to demonstrate that they were a group of employees who were appropriate for recognition. I think the general criteria for forming an appropriate union has pretty much stayed the same throughout the years. The employees would have to have a community of interest, and certainly later on it developed the employees would have to show that their recognition unit would be consistent with the efficiency of the government and that it would be a practical thing which would actually work. The main criteria has always been the community of interest among the employees, and I can tell you about an incident that happened later on in time which involved the criteria, where the agency

actually opposed the recognition asked for by employees, and that case went to the FLRA, the Federal Labor Relations Authority.

But in the beginning, the employees who had asked for recognition, it would be reviewed by management, and management would simply send them a letter indicating that the recognition was granted. There is the possibility that, even in some of those early days, there was an election, but I don't recall any election results from the early recognition units. It was simply a request, a review, and then it was granted.

Ottes: Well, when they are going to have a recognition, who represents the employees of that particular unit? Are they those that are interested in a union, or are they elected by their peers to represent them?

Bork: Well, most of the things occur. The group of employees who were interested would get together, and they would, most likely, elect their leaders. Sometimes, of course, in most cases, the employees will contact one of the national unions, and in the early case, they were always AFGE, American Federation of Government Employees. The first recognition units in FDA were all American Federation of Government Employees units. Once they got the backing and support of the AFGE, they would elect their own officers and stewards.

After Chicago and Boston and the two recognition units in headquarters, there were a number of recognition units which were established in the field in the early 1970s, places like, Detroit, Los Angeles, Baltimore, and probably a couple of others. New York eventually, still in the early '70s, obtained recognition. And Newark was another one, and Buffalo. New York, Newark, and Buffalo initially had their own separate recognition units.

Ottes: Now, when the regions were created in the field, was a recognition unit, the district office, or was it the entire region?

Bork: Well, that comes in a little bit later.

Ottes: That comes later. Okay.

Bork: Well, first of all, it came back to my involvement in labor relations. By the end of the 1960s, I had begun to get involved in labor relations. It was, in fact, in 1969, that I negotiated my first agreement for an FDA organization. And I still remember that one.

At that time, we had an organization called the Perrine Primate Research Laboratory, or maybe it was a branch, located down in Florida, somewhere near Miami. They had a NFEE recognition unit established there, National Federation of Federal Employees. And, again, when it was first established, I wasn't involved, but another person in the Employee Relations Branch was.

Apparently, there was a woman by the name of Phyllis Jones who was the president of the local down there, and I don't know the circumstances, but there were some misunderstandings between her and management, and Employee Relations had gotten involved. And the relationship was not good at the time. But then it came time for them to negotiate an agreement. The person who had been handling them for some reason was moved out of the picture, I guess, maybe in an effort to help calm down the situation and I was sent down there to negotiate this agreement.

I had one really good thing in my favor at the time, because President Nixon at the time had amended the Executive Order on labor relations. And beginning in January 1970, if the employees wanted to negotiate, they could do so, but it would be on their own time. It would not be on official time.

So I go down there about the middle of December, and the union knows that if they don't get an agreement in two weeks, well, any further negotiations will be on their own time. So I had that big advantage over the union.

Anyway, I get down there and I didn't know any of the people, of course, but I met the union president and another woman who was her primary associate. Everybody traveled on Sundays in those days, so Monday morning I meet them. We sit down to negotiate, those two women for the union and

myself and I think his name was something like Jerry Kenney for management. He was something like the top administrative person at the laboratory. I don't know if he was called the administrative officer or what his title was.

We sit down to negotiate, and we start the first morning. By the afternoon, he disappears, and I'm the only one negotiating for management the rest of the week.

Despite the past rocky relationship, it turned out we did very well in negotiating the agreement. By Friday, it was all done and signed. So that was the first agreement I had negotiated. At that time, the agreements had to be approved by the Department, which was still Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) at the time. And so the agreement was sent to the to the Department, and it took them a while, but early in February, the agreement was approved, and one of the officials in the personnel office in the Department sent a letter to my boss commending the person who negotiated the agreement, because it said something to the effect that this is a very good agreement. The parties evidently knew what they wanted and what they were doing in negotiating. So that one turned out pretty well.

But then, you have to contrast that with places like Brooklyn and New York. It's no secret that Brooklyn and New York and unions – this has been definitely the most contentious union fight in the agency throughout the years. It started out that way in the early '70s, and it's that way today.

Ottes: Due primarily to the FDA employees or FDA management?

Bork: Well, I think both elements fit in there. In the early 70's, there were a number of managers in Brooklyn who were very conservative, very firm, and very strict as far as rules pertaining to employees were concerned. When I first started going up there, I think that Cliff Shane was the regional director. He was followed, I think by Caesar Roy. And there were people like George Gerstenberg, who was the New York District Director. George Boone was the head of the New York laboratory, Ted Hope also was one of the supervisors in the lab who worked with George Boone and worked on a lot of the union issues.

There was a person in the union at that time, who is still in New York, not active in the union now, but he was the president of the AFGE local, and his name was Sidney Morse. I think he was a technician in the laboratory, and I think he is still there, even though he's not involved in the union anymore. He was one of the early leaders of the union. As I said, given the cast of characters, there was some friction right from the beginning.

There were a couple of agreements negotiated with the union, first during the '70s and then during the early '80s, and I can't remember how many times I went up to Brooklyn, but I did help quite a bit with the negotiating of those agreements.

And, of course, New York would bring in people from the region like Mike Tuzo, who had been in Buffalo. Ed Wilkins from Newark became involved. There was usually somebody from the personnel office involved, from New York; particularly there was after regionalization occurred in the '80s. But even back in the '70s, there were a couple of people I worked with from the personnel office in New York.

I would still go up there, and sometimes, you know, when we negotiated and really sat across the table from each other and started communicating, it would work out. And they were pleased with the parts of the agreement.

Ottes: Once you negotiate an agreement, can you periodically review that agreement and negotiate another one, or what happens?

Bork: Well, it depends on the language you put in the agreement itself. Each agreement has a particular duration. At that time, most agreements were two or three years. And you can put in a provision for amending the agreement at a particular time, or if after one party gives the other notice that they want to do it, and that kind of thing. So it is possible to amend the agreement. I know, particularly, the later agreement in New York was amended a couple of times after it was initially negotiated.

Ottes: If there isn't any stipulation in the agreement itself, who negotiates any change?

TAPE 1, SIDE B

Bork: Okay. A change would have to be initiated either by management or by the union. Sometimes things would happen outside the district, which would require management to go to the union to tell them about the change, and then the union could request negotiations. Like one time in the '80s, there was a push by the government as a whole to charge employees for parking, so we had to notify the unions about this change at the very top levels of government, and then we had to sit down and, if the union wished, negotiate about the impact and implementation of that change. So, aside from the term negotiation, the actual agreement, sometimes there would be midterm bargaining because of changes like this.

Ottes: Can the union itself request a change in the agreement, or does that have to be with the management itself and not the union?

Bork: Well, in the early years, it was only management who could do that. But in the middle '90s, that changed, and it was actually a Supreme Court decision which allows the union to, on its own, request a change in an agreement. It's either management or union now may request a change. Historically, it's been management pretty much who is, simply notify the union about different events, and then give them the opportunity to negotiate. Not too many of the unions have really used their options to initiate midterm bargaining.

But, again, another interesting thing about these first recognition units that were established, I can think of about five of them, which, once the employees got recognition, nothing ever happened. The employees did not really pursue any relationship with management.

In Detroit District, for example, at this time there were elections. This had to be by the middle '70s. As I understand it, a chemist was behind the push to form a union in Detroit District, and he wanted to form a union for the whole district. But when the employees voted in that particular case, the nonprofessional employees voted for the union, but the professional employees voted not to have a union. Since the person, you know, who was the impetus behind the union movement was a chemist, well, once he found out the professionals were not interested, he sort of just gave up, and we were left with a nonprofessional recognition unit in Detroit, but over the years, they never really did anything, did not negotiate an agreement with management.

Also in Los Angeles, for example. In Los Angeles, AFGE got recognition for two units in the Investigations Branch of the district – not the entire district, just the Investigations Branch, professionals and nonprofessionals. But once they got their recognition – I think that was in 1970 – again, nobody followed up on the recognition. That was what we called a dormant recognition unit.

Ottes: Dormant?

Bork: Dormant, yes. A recognition unit on the books, it existed, but it did not do anything. I think there are also two small units in St. Louis, at the National Center for Drug Analysis, which were the same way. They got recognition of their AFGE for professionals and nonprofessional, but, again, nobody out there ever pursued a relationship with management. That was, again, one of the defunct units in practice.

They just remained on the books, and they did remain on the books pretty much until NPU came into the picture.

Ottes: Did they go on contracts?

Bork: No, not in those locations.

Ottes: I see.

Well, now, you mentioned that in what was formerly region 3, anyway, New York that union agreement was for the entire region.

Bork: Region II, I think.

Ottes: Yes, region II. That was for the entire region?

Bork: Well, at first we had recognition units in Newark, Buffalo, and New York. After a period of time, AFGE consolidated its recognition units there into one, which included all the components.

Ottes: I see.

Bork: It was in the early '80s, probably '82, '83, that New York and the union sat down to negotiate an agreement for all of the units, and that turned out to be a very long, drawn-out, and at times contentious set of negotiations. Ken Silver was at New York by that time, and he had been designated by Caesar Roy to be the labor relations person for the entire region. He was in effect the chief negotiator for management of this particular agreement.

I would go out there from time to time. I didn't stay there for the entire length of the negotiations, but I made several trips up there during the negotiations.

I think Ken's basic philosophy of labor relations was, don't give them a target. He knew the history, and he knew how many ULPs (Unfair Labor Practices) had been filed against management, that kind of thing. And so he tried to work with the union to be a more cooperative relationship. Certainly, during the time that he was in that position, things did calm down and there were fewer ULPs and grievances, that sort of thing. Before he came, after he came, they returned to the contentious atmosphere.

While he was up there, he did work at it. During the negotiations, for example, he would negotiate all day and make some progress at the table, and he would go home at night and he would play on what he called his Wurlitzer. He had to retype the material we ended up talking about and bring the new wording in the next day. And slow but sure, we would agree on one thing or another.

Of course, Caesar Roy had laid down some rules for Ken, too. One of them, one of the interests of the union was the hours of work. Of course, those were in the days when we did not have anything like any NE80 or NE40, or even NE8. And Caesar Roy didn't want to depart from what existed, which was basically an 8-to-4:30 workday. So he told Ken not to even talk about it. But, of course, there were a number of sessions. The union would bring up the subject. Well, Ken would say, "Well, we can't talk about that. Let's talk about the banana." And the banana became synonymous for hours of work and that kind of thing. So that's how they even got to talking about the subject.

Another thing, which I didn't witness personally but which I've heard about, occurred at some of the sessions when I was not there. They would be going at it hot and heavy at the negotiating table, and Ken would, you know, unnoticed by anybody else, reach in his pocket and then take something out, and put his hands under the table. And when people were really yelling at each other, he'd bring his hands up and put his little mechanical toy on the table, and it would go running across, and everybody would laugh, and that would break the tension. That was one of his ways of calming everybody down. From what I've heard it had some success. That was vintage Ken Silver.

Those were the contentious days. You could walk down the hallway during the caucus of these negotiations, and you could hear different people in the union yelling at each other from their caucus room.

I can remember one time when I was up there, there was a caucus going on. Of course, I was with the management team. And during that particular caucus, one person from the management team, who was not an FDA employee – it wasn't me either – anyway, this happened to be a woman. She threw a book at another member of the management team. Sometimes it was hard for management to agree on these issues, too.

Ottes: Did I understand you correctly that this one member of the management team was not an FDA employee?

Bork: Right.

Ottes: Can somebody from the union could be on the management team?

Bork: No, no, no. No, no. This was a member of the management team.

Ottes: I see.

Bork: But this person happened not to be an FDA employee. But there was just friction between two people on the management team, and, you know, that's what occurred.

Ottes: How do they select the employees that are going to represent the employees in the negotiating agreement?

Bork: Well, basically, those who really were interested in the union. That's another point as far as FDA labor relations is concerned.

It seems that traditionally, from the very beginning, if you take a particular district, there might be one or two employees who really were interested in the union. At least one or two people would take the lead. The great majority of the employees would just sit back and watch and see what happened. Oftentimes, the union would have difficulty getting union stewards, for example. And this has been the case. Like I mentioned Sidney Morse had been in New York. He has been succeeded by a couple of employees, Fran Tessinger and David Tobias. But those two, even today, they are by far the people most involved in the union in New York.

Now, both of these people are in the laboratory in New York. Again, traditionally, there's been always a good deal of union activity in the lab, and it's been the focus of the union interest up there -- not the district, not imports, not the regional office, but basically it comes from the lab.

In other places, too, like in Kansas City, where first they had a NFFE recognition unit, National Federation of Federal Employees, and then they switched to National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) early on, in 1978, I think. This was the first real NTEU recognition unit in FDA. They had a person by the name of Joe Underwood. He was one of the early leaders with the union. There was a woman by the name of Patricia Schneider. Then, for a number of years, there was George Van Wey. They, over the years, in the '70s through the '80s, and then probably until the time of NTEU, were the most active in the union in Kansas City.

This was the case in Baltimore. Again, I helped Baltimore District negotiate three different agreements in their AFGE recognition unit. The first one probably was in the early '80s. But Kathleen Mitchell was the union president at the time. She was a Consumer Safety Officer (CSO). I still remember her as the most cooperative union president I've ever dealt with. She would sit down, and it was not really difficult to reach an agreement with her when we negotiated, because she could see, you know. We'd explain why management wanted something, and she would agree with it. It was a very fruitful relationship. Unfortunately, she became ill very young, and I think she has died of cancer or something. But she was a delight to work with.

After that, Jessie Perry, a chemist, took the lead in Baltimore, and also Ray Galacci. They were both in the lab in Baltimore. We negotiated at least two agreements with them, one during the '80s and then one during the early '90s. Tom Hooker was the district director during most of that time, though I think for the last one, Kenneth Shelin was up there at the time.

Anyway, during that time, I worked with all the FDA managers, who went on to bigger things after leaving Baltimore, people like Janice Oliver, Richard Baldwin, Susan Setterberg, and Gary Pierce. You recognize some as Regional Food and Drug Directors (RFDDs).

There are other people out there, too, from management, like Don Vasbinder, who's now, I believe, the acting director of Office of Enforcement (OE). He worked with Gary Pierce in his section up there in Baltimore when we were negotiating. Robin Beck, who is still in Baltimore, also participated in some of the negotiations for management.

Ottes: Headquarters here just recently has union recognition, within the last year or so. NETU, I guess. Were you involved in that?

Bork: Well, to a degree, yes. This was a Department-wide initiative. Actually, what happened was that NTEU and AFGE got together and they sort of divided up the Department between the two of them. There had been a lot of rancorous history between those two organizations. AFGE had recognition for the Social Security Administration (SSA) for years. At one point, NTEU tried to raid AFGE and take SSA away from them, and that built a bad relationship between the two unions. But in the mid-90s, the two unions got together – I guess they realized they shouldn't be fighting each other – and they divided up Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) among themselves. NTEU said they would no longer try to get recognition in SSA, and they left NTEU the rest of the Department, including FDA. So, eventually, in FDA, the AFGE recognition units went to change their affiliation to NTEU, the National Treasury Employees Union, through a procedure which is called a Montrose procedure.

Ottes: What was that procedure?

Bork: The Montrose procedure. This was named after a place in New York, Montrose, New York, where the Veteran's Administration (VA) employees there switched affiliation from one union to another. This is what the Federal Labor Relations Authority uses now when unions do wish to change their affiliation or employees wish to change their union affiliation.

Ottes: Does that mean now that all of the field units that had AFGE are now under NTEU?

Bork: All except one. There's one holdout, and that's Minneapolis District. For some reason or other, Minneapolis District has never been attracted to NTEU. We still have an AFGE recognition unit in Minneapolis District. But all the other recognition units in FDA were eventually combined and consolidated into one NTEU recognition unit, and this occurred in 1997.

Now prior to that, each of the offices in the Department had to prepare and submit a petition to the Federal Labor Relations Authority that this is what the agency wanted in cooperation with NTEU, and I was instrumental in writing the FDA petition for that. I really didn't have any choice. I mean, the agency didn't have any choice. This was really a Department initiative.

Ottes: Did the NTEU then accept the contracts that had been negotiated, or to AFGE, or were there some modifications made?

Bork: Well, I believe they retained their initial agreements until NTEU negotiated an agreement covering all of them. And then the NTEU agreement supplanted or superseded the AFGE agreement.

Ottes: The stewards you mentioned, what authority and, what are their responsibilities as stewards?

Bork: Okay. Well, this is based on the internal structure and organization of the union. It is the union who determines what the functions and responsibilities of the stewards are. It's basically to represent employees in a given location, whether it be in grievances, whether it be an employee who's been the subject of a disciplinary action, and really to deal with management concerning any changes in conditions of employment and personnel policies, if new policies are established. The stewards and the officers of the local union would speak on behalf of the employees to management.

We haven't touched really yet on what happened at the end of the 1970s. We had all these AFGE recognition units in the field, and most of the Labor Relations (LR) program was in the field at that time. I was the only person in the agency who was servicing those particular recognition units.

It was at that point, about 1980, that the regional personnel offices were established. Our SSA, Social Security Administration, funded the regional personnel offices. And when they were established, in their organization, they had a labor relations specialist in each of the 10 regions, at the time the 10D HHS regions. Since all of the FDA recognition units basically were in the field, except a couple of small ones there in Beltsville, and there was a small one in the National Center for Toxicological Research (NCTR), actually, that was taking away most of my job, because the people in the field were going to service these recognition units from New York, Chicago, wherever they were located. So for a while, at that point, I was detailed to the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Health (OASH). I was given a choice of following the program or going to a different personnel job, and I chose to follow the labor relations program. Eventually I was detailed to OASH as the labor relations specialist, and it was there that I began to work with all of the Public Health Service (PHS) agencies in headquarters.

Ottes: What year was that, George?

Bork: Oh, it was probably about 1981, 1982, something like that.

When we were established here in the Parklawn Building, I became part of the OASH personnel office, and I worked with a couple other fellows up there handling labor relations for the entire Public Health Service. That included places like the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Institutes of Health (NIH), Health Services and Research Administration (HRSA), and Indian Health Service (IHS).

First of all, I did a lot of training, and I did it for different agencies. I did it for the Indian Health Service; I did a lot for FDA.

It was during that time that Dick Davis from Philadelphia and Pitt Smith from Buffalo had set up some supervisory training, and they included labor relations in the topics covered during that training. There were several times, for example, that I went down to Texas, to the dude ranch at Bandera, Texas, and did the labor relations part of the training there.

I think there was the first time that I started involving the trainees in these mock negotiation exercises. I would write up a script for management and the union and give them each their little scripts, give them a little time to prepare, and then the trainees would just try to reach an agreement on something or other.

As I said, I went down to Bandera several times. I think once we even went to the Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs for training.

I was doing this while I was up in OASH, and at the same time was helping other FDA organizations, like Baltimore District, negotiate agreements that kind of thing, whatever came up. And I was negotiating at the time. I negotiated an agreement for NIH involving North Carolina. So I was working with and for all the DHHS agencies.

It was about 1995, then, that, you know, what goes around comes around, and at that point SSA was pulling out of the Department, and when they were pulling out, of course, they took their moneybags with them. The Department could not afford to keep these regional personnel offices going anymore, so those were reorganized out of the District. Some of the regional labor relations people came to FDA and started working for FDA, like Bill Nealon in Philadelphia and Andy Rudyk in New York. He's still the training officer in New York at this time. And Bill is still doing labor relations for New York from out of Philadelphia, and I work with him quite closely.

But, at any rate, shortly after the regional personnel office was established, a new surgeon general came in, and he went along with the initiative to really get rid of the personnel labor relations level in the Public Health Service. At that point, the people from the personnel office in PHS had to find other jobs, and there was an effort made to help them find jobs in the various HHS agencies.

I can remember, one person who was running this outplacement program wanted me to go to IHS, to take a job there as a labor-relations person, but I declined that because all along, in the back of my head, the one place I wanted to go was back to FDA, and I didn't want to go back to the FDA personnel office necessarily; I wanted to back to the Office of Regulatory Affairs (ORA) the field part of FDA. The reorganization I think was supposed to begin October 1, and it was getting down closer to the wire. It must have been September or so, and I still was sitting up therein OASH without a place to go to.

One day, I got a call from Jerry Henderson in FDA. He introduced himself. I didn't even know him. He asked me on the phone if I would be interested in coming to work for ORA and the Office of Resource Management (ORM). I think I surprised him by how quickly I said yes. It must have taken maybe two seconds. That was in 1995. So I came back to FDA then to work for Jerry Henderson.

Of course, after him, I worked for Malcolm Frazier, and now, of course, for Jim Strachan. I've been here for the last seven, eight years, about eight years now.

Ottes: Do commissioned officers belong to unions?

Bork: No. They're considered to be pretty much in the same category as the military. They belong to the Uniformed Services, so they cannot be represented by a union, and they cannot take part in union activities. Of course, we have commissioned corps officers who are supervisors. They can deal with the labor-relations issues that come up among their employees, but they themselves cannot be represented.

Ottes: As we conclude, I'd like to thank you, George for the interview. It has added new information to the FDA Oral History record.

END OF INTERVIEW