Mike Roche spent more than four decades at Manchester Water Works and was the longest-serving union president in the city, heading up Steel Workers 8938 from 1982 to 2014. He didn’t mince words after details of the Manchester Police Department’s “chief days” were revealed in the New Hampshire Union Leader and Sunday News.

“This unfortunately is an abuse of power,” wrote Roche in an email.

Chief days are the apparent long-standing department practice whereby Manchester chiefs rewarded officers with a paid day off that isn’t counted toward earned vacation time.

“Personal days were already covered in all three police contracts,” Roche wrote. “One bargaining unit receives four days if they have 25 years of service and have not abused their sick leave. Chief days could not be tracked because the human resources and finance departments could not tell from the payroll submitted because it was shown that the employees were working, when in fact, they were not. If this isn’t fraud, I don’t know what is.”

Under their collective bargaining agreement, Manchester police officers are eligible for up to 400 hours of unused vacation buyback when they leave the department. Vacation time not taken due to a chief day accrues toward these buy-backs.

Roche estimates the 100 chief days handed out equates to a $38,000 tab picked up by the taxpayer.

“The extra day given out for using little or no sick leave should have been negotiated,” Roche writes. “My former union, and others, negotiated similar language decades ago. The only difference between this and having a co-worker punch a time clock, i.e. stealing time, is that this involves top management. Department heads do not have the authority to circumvent city ordinances or items that are subject to bargaining. Employees who are in unions get fired end of that school year, or a bonus day off, to be taken during the next school year; provided, however, that the paid day off is approved by the Superintendent or his designee.”

The teacher may decide to give up a bonus day at any time during the next school year, after which a payment of the per diem will occur during the next pay period.

The use and granting of bonus days are tracked by school administrators.

Manchester Human Resources Director Jane Gile is on the record saying she was unaware of the police departments chief day bonuses, while former Mayor Ted Gatsas said he was unaware of the bonus days and would not have approved of the practice.

Data shows far fewer bonus days for teachers have been granted than chief days for cops in recent years.

Police Chief Nick Willard has said he awarded chief days to more than 100 officers in 2017. According to a “Teacher Attendance and Substitute Analysis” report compiled by the school district earlier this year, 23 bonus days were taken by teachers in the 2017 school year, accounting for .27 percent of the 8,274 teacher absences reported. Final numbers for this past school year have yet to be compiled, but as of Feb. 9 there were 23 bonus day-related absences reported, out of 7,431 total teacher absences.

Speaking of that contract

with the MEA, teachers union President Sue Hannan confirmed last week that members have authorized a “work to contract” effort — doing only what’s in their contract — starting July 1 if a new deal isn’t reached.

Some around the city feared this might impact the
for much less than this.”

“Having fewer boots on the street for 800 hours does not make the city of Manchester safe,” Roche states. “As a person who negotiated city contracts for over 32 years, I feel this is definitely a negotiable item.”

Ongoing coverage regarding chief days sparked comparisons by some readers to the school district giving teachers “bonus days.”

But the two items are like comparing apples and oranges — bonus days are contractually negotiated, while chief days are apparently awarded off the books as rewards for good deeds.

According to the current contract with the Manchester Education Association (MEA) — which expires June 30 — a teacher earns sick leave at the rate of 1½ days at the beginning of each month of employment from Sept. 1 through and including June 1 of the school year, not to exceed 15 sick days during the entire year.

The contract states, “If a teacher uses no sick leave during a school year, the teacher may choose either a bonus payment equal to a per diem, to be paid at the...

The bookmobile will stop at city parks, pools and schools over five weeks, every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from July 9 to Aug. 10. Regular stops include Livingston Park, Beech Street School, YMCA of Downtown Manchester, Steven’s Park at Manchester Cal Ripken field, Elmwood Gardens and Kelley Falls.

The bookmobile will be staffed by MSD educators, city librarians and other volunteers.

Hannan said the bookmobile is not a school activity, and both she and union Vice President Maxine Mosley are volunteering their time.

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City Hall

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