

Yale Unions To Vote

Workers Consider Strike Authorization

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By WILLIAM WEIR, Courant Staff Writer

NEW HAVEN -- Amid charges that Yale has done nothing to change a 60-year history of bad labor relations, three unions representing more than 4,000 university workers will vote today on whether to take the first step toward a strike.

The three unions representing clerical, maintenance and food service workers, Local 34, Local 35 and District 1199, will each vote on whether to authorize their negotiating committees to call a strike.

Union officials stressed that such authorization doesn't necessarily mean there will be a strike. Union leaders said earlier this summer that they were looking at a strike sometime in October should the measure pass. But Tuesday they said there was no timeline.

At a press conference Tuesday on the Yale campus, union officials said they want to see wholesale changes in how the university and the unions communicate. Only then, they said, can specific issues be adequately addressed.

Officials of District 1199, which represents 150 food service workers at Yale-New Haven Hospital, want to expand into other hospital departments but union member Ray Milici said Yale administrators have "refused to even talk to us about the issue."

Though workers didn't bring up the unionization of graduate student employees Tuesday, the issue has long been a contentious one.

In an open letter sent last week to faculty, staff and students, university President Richard Levin suggested that the unions' support for the graduate student workers and for the expansion of District 1199 has distracted them from their job of securing contracts for the employees represented by Local 34 and Local 35.

Laura Smith, president of Local 34, said she was hopeful last year that relations would improve when the university hired a consultant. Though the consultant issued a report, she said, the university has largely ignored it.

Yale spokesman Tom Conroy said the university has held several bargaining sessions at the urging of the consulting firm and offered proposals based on its recommendations.

Robert Proto, president of Local 35, charged that Levin hasn't attended any of the bargaining sessions and that Vice President Robert Culver has attended only a few. This, he said, indicates that Yale isn't serious about changing its relations with the unions.

"Our members are angry," he said. "Our members are going to vote tomorrow because

our members are serious about change."

In his letter, Levin wrote that the administration has been trying vainly to improve communications.

"Reluctantly, I have concluded that the unions' leaders are more interested in preparing for confrontation during the academic year than in discussing and resolving the contract issues that remain," he stated in the letter.

Levin also stated that the administration offered a six-year contract with salary increases of more than 6 percent a year for the employees of Local 34. Local 35 employees would receive salary increases of more than 3 percent. Both unions would also receive pension increases between 8 and 13 percent.

Though she has some questions about how those figures were calculated, Deborah Chernoff, a spokeswoman for the unions, said the workers' concerns are bigger than any contract specifics.

"The focus here is that there is a long history of dysfunctional labor relations," she said. "Eleven strikes in 60 years is nothing to be proud of, for either side.">

When two unions went on one-month strikes in 1996, Conroy said, management staff took over some of the work and Yale students were given money to purchase food off campus.