

John Stepp's role in Yale negotiations

New Haven Register

During the news conference, held at Yale's Cross Campus, union leaders repeatedly cited recommendations for union-management peace made by John Stepp, a consultant Levin hired last year.

"Yale won't even talk about their own consultant's recommendations," Proto said. "In fact, President Levin has removed (Stepp) from the bargaining process."

The unions most often cite Stepp's first recommendation: "Some understanding as to how current organizing efforts will be conducted and how the union's long-term need to grow its business (should) be addressed."

The union leaders see this as an endorsement of their efforts to organize university graduate students and about 1,800 service workers at Yale-New Haven Hospital. University officials say Stepp made no such specific recommendation.

Reached for comment in Washington Tuesday, Stepp said, "Nothing in that recommendation is intended to suggest what the resolution should be, only that a resolution is critical. I'm not advocating any (specific) solution."

Stepp said the recommendation does not call for card count neutrality, which the unions favor. He said that method is just "one of the possibilities."

Under card count neutrality, management agrees to remain silent on unionization and if a majority of the workers sign union cards, the union is then recognized. University and hospital officials instead back National Labor Relations Board secret ballot elections.

Stepp declined comment on whether Levin is "ignoring" his recommendations. He said the university has not canceled his services. "On call" would be a good way to describe his situation, Stepp said.

Local 34 President Laura Smith said at the news conference, "We're still optimistic. But we're determined to make these changes happen - peacefully, if possible."

Asked whether rank and file members of Locals 34 and 35 will continue to go without the benefits of new contracts for the sake of graduate students and hospital workers, Smith said, "Our members expect real change on this campus. That's what they're willing to fight for."

A consultant that Yale University and its two major labor unions chose to study Yale's rancorous labor relations issued a report yesterday that severely criticized both the university and the unions.

The consultant, Restructuring Associates Inc. of Washington, found that employees said there was a caste system at Yale and that those not directly involved in an intellectual pursuit were consigned to an underclass. The consultant added that Yale was perceived as being anti-union and had a strategy somewhere between containing the unions and fighting their growth.

But the consultant, which conducted more than 100 interviews, also had harsh words for the unions, noting that they often defended the most serious misbehavior and poor performance by their members. Many of those interviewed said that Yale's work force was apathetic and that many employees were malingerers who disappeared for long periods.

Restructuring Associates called on the university and the two unions representing Yale's clerical, service, maintenance and technical workers to change their hostile ways and to develop a new, cooperative approach to problem-solving. This, the consultant's report stated, will require a profound change in the way Yale manages its nonacademic work force and the way the two unions represent their 3,900 members.

"A university that prides itself on developing critical thinking capabilities in its undergraduates could reap tremendous benefits from managing its own employees as if they were capable of independent thought," the report said.

By publicizing some jarring statements made by those interviewed, the consultant appeared to want to shock both sides into changing their ways. The quotes taken from Yale employees interviewed included these:

"Yale is an elitist institution with disdain for working people."

"Our union leadership is lazy and politically insecure. They prefer to hide in the tall grass and snipe at management."

"We're treated like children. Is it any wonder that after a while you begin to behave like a child?"

Yale and the two unions, Locals 34 and 35 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union, issued a joint statement saying that the report reaffirmed much of what the parties already knew. They said they recognized that the labor-management relationship at Yale had for decades been "typically adversarial, unproductive, noisy and not terribly helpful." Since 1968, there have been seven strikes at Yale, the most in the Ivy League.

The university and unions said they "are committed to make this new process succeed, but it will take patience, understanding and the support of our entire community."