

Legal Services Lawyers Strike For Pay Raise

No New Matters Taken; Caseload Said Covered

BY DANIEL WISE

CLOSE TO 250 attorneys and clerical workers providing civil legal services to the poor went on strike yesterday.

Both sides said yesterday that approximately 95 percent of the union's membership honored strike lines.

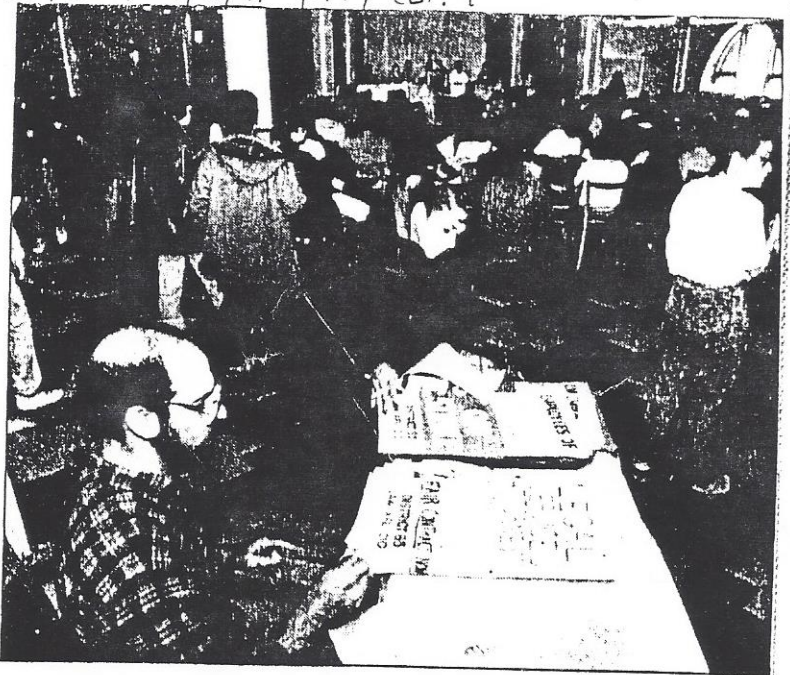
Nonetheless, Dale Johnson, the executive director of Legal Services for New York City, said that management attorneys were covering the strikers' caseload with a minimum of disruption. No new clients are being taken, he added, except in emergencies.

Gordon Deane, a spokesperson for the union, the Legal Services Staff Association, said that prior to the strike attorneys had attempted to adjourn as many cases as possible and to take other steps to facilitate management's takeover of their cases.

The strike started after a holiday weekend of intense bargaining that resulted in progress on some issues, but no movement on salaries, according to both sides.

The union is demanding an across the board increase of 30 percent for all employees, and management is offering attorneys a 15 percent increase

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Legal Services Staff Association members prepare for yesterday's strike during a meeting at the union's headquarters in Manhattan.

PHOTOGRAPH BY FAYE ELLMAN

and secretaries 6.7 percent.

Mr. Deane, the union spokesperson, said that the union was seeking to close a 35 percent gap between what attorneys earn in the civil legal services program and salaries paid attorneys at The Legal Aid Society, most of whom work on criminal cases.

Mr. Deane characterized the union's demands as flexible, but said no concessions had been made over

the weekend because management had not added to its offer.

Mr. Johnson, the head of Legal Services, described management's offer as being far more generous than contracts being offered to city workers and in other sectors of the economy. Management will not move on its last offer, he said, until the union comes

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closer to "the realm of reality."

Mr. Johnson added that the latest management offer is not "a take-it-or-leave-it proposition," but that the possibilities for adjustment were limited.

Starting salaries for Legal Services lawyers under the contract that expired last Dec. 31 are \$27,750. They rise to \$32,010 after five years and to \$35,707 after 10 years.

Management's offer of a 15 percent increase would bring those salaries to \$30,000 in the first year, \$38,000 after five years and \$44,000 after 10 years.

Comparable salaries being paid at the Legal Aid Society are \$31,500 for first-year attorneys, \$45,102 for those in the fifth year and \$52,752 in the 10th year. Contract negotiations are also underway between the Society and its 1,000 unionized lawyers.

Sides Clash

Citywide, Legal Services for New York City fields approximately 170 lawyers, 100 of whom are union members, with a budget of \$21 million in state and federal funds. The lawyers provide free legal help to the poor with housing, welfare and child-custody problems. Unlike the Legal Aid So-

ciety, the seven nonprofit corporations operating within the Legal Services for New York City umbrella are not chartered to handle any criminal cases.

The two sides differed sharply in their assessment of the fiscal impact of the union's demands. Mr. Johnson said implementation would create a \$2.8 million deficit in the first year of the contract.

Mr. Deane countered for the union that the organization had \$1.8 million in new funding this year from the Interest on Lawyer Accounts fund (IOLA) which could be used to meet the union's wage demands. The program has also received a 3.7 percent increase in its funding from the federal Legal Services Corporation, he reported.

Mr. Deane estimated the cost of funding the union's proposed salaries at \$2.3 million.

The other main areas of contention are the union's demands for a wage scale that guarantees annual pay increases; higher pension contributions and a stringent anti-sexual harassment policy.

Both sides reported some progress over the weekend on the wage scale question. Mr. Johnson said that man-

agement was willing to set up a scale for non-lawyer employees that provides a differential based on experience. Attorneys are already paid salaries pegged to their year of graduation.

The union is seeking an annual pay raise not be bound to each round of contract negotiations. Mr. Johnson said the program could not commit itself in advance to yearly increases without knowing its funding situation.

On the pension issue, the union is asking for an employer contribution equal to 7 percent of wages. Management has offered to increase its present 4 percent contribution to 4.5 percent.

The parties' disagreement over the program's anti-sexual harassment policy centers over whether it should be a part of the contract. Mr. Deane said management had refused to negotiate the policy and make it a part of the contract where it would not be subject to unilateral change.

Mr. Johnson said that substantively it is impossible to distinguish management's policy from the union's proposal. But, he said, making the policy a part of the contract would give the union "veto power over [the program's] board of directors."