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Striking Lawyers Take Over Building

Legal Services advertises
for replacement workers

By T.J. Collins

STAFF WRITER

About 30 striking lawyers and paralegals occupied a Lower East Side office of Legal Services for New York City yesterday to protest the planned hiring of replacement workers in the 16-week strike.

The MFY Legal Services office, on Avenue A between Second and Third Streets, was taken over just before the start of a rally in support of the strikers in front of the building. Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messinger and other politicians attended the rally.

Messinger said she was angry that the strike has not been settled and was upset about an ad seeking temporary replacement workers that appeared in Monday's edition of the New York Law Journal. (House passes replacement worker bill, Page 36.)

Assemb. Vito Lopez (D-Brooklyn) accused Legal Services of trying to break District 65's Legal Services Staff Association, the union that represents the strikers. Legal Services has continued to receive state and federal funds during the strike. "If the money continues to flow, they may never settle," Lopez said.

The strikers said they would stay in the office until a settlement is reached or they are removed by force. "We're staying because they refuse to pull their ads for scabs," said Scott Sommer, a union spokesman. "We will stay until the police remove us or we have a contract."

The union has about 250 members who are lawyers, paralegals and secretaries providing free legal services for indigent clients in civil cases involving such matters as housing, foster care and welfare.

Last week, Dale Johnson, the executive director of Legal Services, said the organization would advertise this week for temporary replacement workers to take the jobs of the strikers. An ad ran Monday, but apparently no replacement workers have been hired.

After a lapse of several weeks, negotiations between the union and management resumed Monday. The union is seeking raises of 19 percent for lawyers and 16 percent for other union members in the first year of a two-year contract. In the second year, they are seeking 16 percent raises for all members. Under the old contract, a starting lawyer was paid \$27,500 a year, and the highest paid lawyers would receive \$56,148 a year.