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A STRIKE IN THE IVY LEAGUE—YALE CLERICALS DEMAND A FAIR SALARY

by Lori Gladstein

Since September 26, 1984, 1600 clerical and technical workers have been on strike at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. Locals 34 and 35 of the Federation of University Employees, AFL-CIO, are members of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees International Union. The striking workers represent approximately 60% of the bargaining unit. Most of the 950 full-time members of Local 35, representing service and maintenance workers, are honoring the picket lines, as are 350 part-time student workers.

Clerical and technical workers are striking over the economic aspects of the contract, having settled with Yale on non-economic issues last spring. The union describes the conflict as one of economic discrimination and the need for comparable worth, and Yale contends that it cannot afford to pay more than its last offer.

Yale and Labor Unions—The first labor union at Yale was established by service and maintenance workers in 1941. Including the current strike, Yale has had seven strikes since 1941, the longest and most recent, lasting eighty days in 1977. The current Local 35 contract expires in January 1985.

In May 1983, clerical and technical employees voted to be represented by Local 34 of the Federation of University Employees. Negotiations began in October 1983, and continued through winter and spring 1984. A partial settlement was reached on April 4, 1984, averting a strike. To reach a partial contract, Yale had increased its offer twice from its initial offer made in January 1984. The partial contract covered most non-wage issues. The provisions of the partial contract that have been implemented include a new grievance procedure, health and safety regulations, employee participation policies, promotion and transfer policies that provide for consideration of senior and internal candidates, and job security. A modified agency shop provision was agreed upon in the April 4 contract, but it will not be implemented until there is a complete contract settlement.

Unionization and Women's Work—The organization of Local 34 and the Yale strike are evidence that women and "women's work" belong in organized labor. The occupations represented by Local 34 are clerical and 82% of its members are women. The clerical and technical bargaining unit includes a variety of jobs: office personnel (secretaries and typists), laboratory staff (technicians, instrument operators), library and museum staff, printers, and photographers. With the composition of the union, much of the publicity surrounding the strike focuses on comparable worth. The basis of comparable worth is equal pay for jobs of equal worth. According to Yale University President A. Bartlett Giametti, Yale is opposed to the imposition of comparable worth on the wage structure. While the union and other groups (AFL-CIO, and the National Organization of Women) have argued for comparable worth at Yale, the administration has responded with claims that it does not discriminate and that it cannot afford to pay more. Virtually every member of the community has heard from the union about the large size of Yale's endowment fund and from the administration about its financial commitments to students, research, and to other employees. These arguments about Yale's ability to pay miss the point; the central issue is whether or not Yale pays a fair wage. Regardless of the size of the endowment or expenditure constraints imposed by other aspects of the budget, the university is obligated to pay a fair wage, and to grant equal access to all jobs.

A Salary Gap—Facts about average salaries and fairness of pay are often difficult to evaluate. Focusing on average salaries ignores the important issues concerning the distribution of salaries across job classifications and ignores whether all workers have access to jobs. The average, full-time clerical and technical salary is \$13,424. According to Local 34, a clinical secretary with nine years at Yale earns \$12,550, and an editorial assistant with two years service (plus a Masters Degree in English) earns \$13,000. Statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics confirm that \$13,424 is not a living wage. In Fall 1981, a family of four in New England needed \$16,402 for a low standard of living and \$29,213 for a moderate standard of living.

Behind charges of unfair salaries lies the issue of economic discrimination by race and sex. According to the union, employment at Yale follows a familiar pattern of discrimination: white men earn the most, followed by white women, black men, and black women. The following table presents a salary distribution by race and sex:

<i>Group</i>	<i>Avg. Salary</i>	<i>No. of FT Employees</i>	<i>Avg. Years at Yale</i>	<i>Avg. Years Present Job</i>
White men	\$14,324	293	5.7	4.0
White women	13,408	1439	5.8	3.9
Black men	12,813	57	5.3	4.0
Black women	12,603	235	7.1	4.5

Source: Local 34, Federation of University Employees

The administration claims these figures are misleading because salaries are not broken down by salary grade and years of service. There can be two types of discrimination; (1) with a salary grade, where different wages are paid to people with the same number of years of service, and (2) across job grades. The former is easier to detect and some evidence indicates that Yale does not discriminate within salary grades. The second form of discrimination, across job grades, is sometimes called access discrimination, or occupational segregation, and it is a result of restricting the types of job to which women and minorities have access. Access discrimination is the union's charge against Yale. Recently, the sphere of disagreement widened to include other members of the university community. In September, Yale economics professor Ray Fair released econometric results showing evidence of access discrimination. Using data supplied by Yale, Professor Fair found that women are paid significantly less than men, and that blacks are paid significantly less than whites, after accounting for age, time at Yale, time in grade, and education. These results do not show why women and blacks are paid less than their productivity warrants. Yale's position since spring 1984 has been that it follows national salary patterns and that national economic discrimination is an issue for which it should not be held accountable.

Proposal: Many Differences Remain—A private mediator has been involved in negotiations since September 1, 1984. The union has called repeatedly for binding arbitration, which Yale rejects. The two sides remain far apart in offers and proposals. Since the beginning of the strike, the administration has refused to increase its offer. The two sides resumed negotiations on November 15, when the union submitted a new proposal, its second since the strike started. The administration refused to increase the economic value of its offer, and negotiations appear to be deadlocked once again. Yale's latest offer, and apparently its final offer, calls for a 24.3% average-salary increase. According to Yale, the average salary increase for current clerical and technical workers would be \$3,265 by July 1, 1986 at a rate of 7.5% per year. The union proposal calls for across the board increases of 8% in each year of the three year and an average salary increase of 29% over the three years, plus a cost of living adjustment (COLA). Yale is not offering a COLA to Local 34, although its contract with Local 35 includes a partial COLA. The union proposes a partial COLA starting January 1, 1986. The union believes that Yale's offer amounts to only 18.1%, while the university asserts that the union's 29% proposal is really 47%.

Yale as a Leader—Since Yale is New Haven's largest employer, it has an obligation to the community to maintain its financial viability. However, Yale cannot hide behind its claim of nationwide economic discrimination. If wages are not fair, efforts must be made to correct the problem. Yale should act as a leader in correcting wage discrimination and disassociate itself from the position taken by Yale University Provost William Brainard when he said, "I know that one can't live the way one would like to, or the way one would like one's family to live, on a Yale clerical and technical salary. That's a national problem, which Yale can't be expected to solve."

--Lori Gladstein

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