

AFSCME LOCAL 517 SPECIAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING MINUTES February 1, 2010

The meeting was called to order at noon. Members had many questions regarding the Tentative Agreement and were offered an opportunity to speak. Judie stressed that the meeting would be conducted in an orderly and respectful manner. Scott Grefe, our Field Rep, provided a summary of what has happened to date as well as answers to members' questions.

Summary: On January 6, 2010, both Exempt and Non-Exempt members voted on the County's final offer which was no general increase in 2010 or 2011, and a step increase in 2010 but not in 2011. The Exempt unit accepted and Non-Exempt did not. After the "no" vote, Scott contacted the Mediator to investigate the possibility of getting all parties back together and then also filed papers to strike. On Wednesday, January 27, the Negotiations Committee met with the County, their Attorney and the Mediator at the Bureau of Mediation Services in St. Paul. A Tentative Agreement was reached by taking the cost equivalent of the step increase and sharing equally among all members. It will be a lump sum payment in July for all Non-Exempt members employed as of January 20, 2010. The Negotiations Committee is recommending acceptance on Wednesday, February 3. The ballot will read the same: "Yes" or "Reject/Strike." If you reject this offer, that means you're ready to walk with a picket sign in your hand.

Everyone needs to remember that this is not the Negotiating Committee's or Executive Board's union, it is everybody's union. A good analogy is to compare it to a gym membership rather than an insurance policy. It's not an insurance policy where you pay premiums and get rescued when you have a problem. It's more like a gym membership. If you pay your dues and never go to the gym but still look the same, you have nobody to blame but yourself. You get out what you put into it.

Question: *Why didn't the Negotiations Committee give a recommendation for the first offer?*

Answer: When we first began contract negotiations, which were not typical because of current economic conditions, the County had all zeroes for general and step increases. We continued to negotiate with our goal of getting something for everybody. Their final offer was a step increase for 2010 but nothing for those at the top of their range. The Negotiations Committee wasn't happy with the final offer but the County wanted us to put it out to a vote. We couldn't in good conscience recommend acceptance of what we felt was not a fair offer.

Question: *Can't we just vote on the first offer again?*

Answer: No. That offer was turned down, and you don't go back to the negotiating table asking to vote on the same thing. We had to go back and negotiate a different option. After the "no" vote, the biggest complaint we heard was that members at the top of their range would not get anything. If the cost of health insurance were to increase next year, that would set them back even farther. We decided that the best thing to do was to take the total dollar amount of the step increase and distribute it evenly to all Non-Exempt members.

Question: *Wasn't this costed out? This seems like a worse offer than the first? The total dollar amount of the steps should be double what the County is saying.*

Answer: The thing you have to keep in mind is that not all employees would have gotten a step increase at the first of the year. If someone has an anniversary at the end of the year, then the increase would have essentially just been for 2011. Again, the first offer was turned down so we had to come back with an alternative.

Question: *If steps are taken out, isn't it going to be harder to get them back in the future?*

Answer: The most important thing is that the language for step increases has not been removed from the contract; just the percentages have been changed. Had the language been totally removed, then it would have been harder to get back into the contract. We've fought hard for everything that is in our contract.

Question: *What happens if we vote "no" again?*

Answer: It will not bring us back to the bargaining table. Be ready to walk with a picket sign in your hand. In order to be successful the majority need to strike. If this does not happen, then you risk receiving nothing as the County is not obligated to go back to the bargaining table. An unsuccessful strike also does long-term irreparable harm to our Local and affects our future bargaining power. We've fought very hard just to get the contract language we currently have in place and do not want to lose that.

Question: *If we don't get any kind of an increase shouldn't the union avoid raising our dues?*

Answer: There was an automatic dues increase of \$.60 per month which went into effect last month. The increase had already been in place because of the previous year's contract.

Question: *Why is it that the County can spend all that money building a new Courts building but not give us a decent raise?*

Answer: That is an entirely different issue as it was funded by bonds. The other thing is that the human factor has been removed from these negotiations. It is the County Commissioners that determine your increases and not all of them value the services we provide. Most members attending the meeting today do not come to our General Membership Meetings, but there are things you can do to make future negotiations better. Everyone can help to get worker-friendly candidates elected to the Board of Commissioners. It does not matter if you live in Wisconsin because your paychecks are coming from Washington County.

Question: *Is there an attorney that reviews the contract?*

Answer: Yes. My boss was actually there the day we reached the tentative agreement. Our Council #5 Director (Eliot Seide) also looked at it and it has been reviewed by our attorney.

Question: *If we can't make it to vote can we do an absentee ballot?*

Answer: No. We follow the International AFSCME's Elections Rules in the International Constitution and they do not recommend absentee voting.

Comments from Jeff Birttnen:

- One thing we can do to become a stronger union is to convert fee payers to full members. The higher percentage of full members we have the more it will help for future contract negotiations.
- Day on the Hill is Wednesday, February 17. This is a chance to talk to your state legislators. The union will pay your wages for the day. You are required to pay a \$20 fee though as this is a political event and our Local cannot pay for it. This covers your lunch and reception at the Crown Plaza to close the event.
- If you want to support worker-friendly candidates, you can contribute to the PEOPLE fund for as little as \$1.00 per pay period. Our union dues are not used to fund political campaigns.

One final note: If you are not a full member you can sign up at the time of the vote. However, you will be required to be a member for the next six months. The cost of processing the paperwork for the Council #5 staff and the County drives this requirement. Plus, we need to have this requirement in place as it would not be fair to members who have been at full member status all along to allow someone to sign up just to vote and then go back to becoming a fee payer.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy Cunnien