New York Museum of Modern Art strike ends

Our correspondent
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Workers who have been on strike since April 28 have voted to end their walkout in light of a contract settlement reached on September 9 by the Museum of Modern Art in New York City and the union. The 134-day strike is the longest in the museum's history. The old contract had expired October 31, 1999.

The Professional and Administrative Staff Association (PASTA) which is Local 2110 of the United Auto workers agreed to a five-year contract providing a 3 percent raise in the first year, 4 percent in the second, and 3.5 percent in each of the last 3 years. The union had originally demanded a 5 percent raise the first year, and a 4 percent raise in each of the next four years.

PASTA represents various staff personnel such as curators, graphic artists, librarians, and secretaries. The annual salaries of these employees range as high as $50,000 for associate curators, and as low as $17,000 for beginning bookstore workers. The median wage is $28,000 per year.

Although the union represents about 250 staff employees, there was approximately one half of that figure still on strike by the time of the agreement. About one-third were not union members to begin with, and a number of discouraged strikers eventually crossed the picket lines as the conflict dragged on. Although about 150 artists wrote a letter supporting the strikers, the construction unions had their members cross the picket line to do demolition work for the museum.

PASTA was one of the 6 unions in the museum, representing 250 of the museum's total of 630 employees. The leaderships of the other 5 bargaining units required their members to continue to work throughout the strike

The settlement gives workers the right to return to work when they are furloughed when much of the museum will be closed during a five-year $650 million expansion project. It also provides for an agency shop, requiring that all workers in the bargaining unit be required to either join the union or pay the equivalent in union dues.

The museum appears to have won its goal of greater flexibility in the administrating of its health plan for union members and management employees. This involves the right of the museum to unilaterally impose changes in health coverage if it fails to reach an agreement with the union on the changes that it seeks.

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