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Top Stories

## Yale braces for long strike

Mary E. O'Leary, Register Topics Editor, and Mark Zaretsky, Register staff  
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**NEW HAVEN** — Mayor John DeStefano Jr. brought leaders from Yale University and its unions, including Yale President Richard C. Levin, together Tuesday in a last ditch effort to forestall a major strike set to take place this morning at 12:01.



The Rev. Jesse Jackson, center, meets with Yale University union retirees and other clergy. Unions at the campus planned to rally Wednesday with Jackson, who has appeared on campus in support of the workers. AP

In the meantime, eight Yale retirees were staging a sit-in at the office of David F. Swensen, the university's chief investment officer, which began just after noon.

The group meet with civil rights leader Jesse Jackson shortly before 8 p.m. and in an impromptu press conference said they planned to remain there until Yale agreed to improve its pensions.

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Yale police and management remained in the building and the sit-in appeared open ended at press time just before 10 p.m.

"This could be the beginning of something," nationwide, Jackson said, of the protest by the retirees, because of "their ability to illuminate" the issue of seniors living on small pensions.

"These seniors are showing that seniors have power," he said.

Jackson, who has close ties to the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Workers, which represents the 4,000 Yale workers, is scheduled to

address the strikers this afternoon as they wind up their first day of picketing.

Instead, "the street theater," as one Yale official called it, began early with the sit-in. Union and Yale spokesmen said the mayor called the union and university leaders together at City Hall to hash out a possible settlement, which is stalled over wages, pensions, retroactivity and job security for Local 34.

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Movement on the terms has been incremental over 115 bargaining sessions, with no progress made in the last few sessions leading up to the expected strike, the ninth walkout since 1965.

Yale spokesman Thomas Conroy said the parties met earlier in the day with the mayor and were called back to City Hall around 7:30 p.m. as the clock ticked down to a strike.

Doris Rogan, 74, who retired from Yale in 1997 after 11 years, said in a cell phone call from Swensen's conference room at 55 Whitney Ave. around 4 p.m., that they wanted to meet with him to discuss their "meager pensions."

Swensen is the person credited with Yale's record investment performance, which has resulted in an approximate \$10.5 billion endowment. The same investment strategy is responsible for a \$200 million surplus in the pension plan.

Rogan said she takes home \$349 a month. Conroy said the amount of a pension depends on one's job and length of service. Swensen was not around, but the group meet with employees of Yale's personnel office who explained the history of the pension plan, Conroy said.

The eight are represented by attorneys Hugh Keefe and Tara Knight.

Yale senior Alek Felstiner and some other undergraduates picked up some sandwiches at the nearby Subway in the afternoon and tried to deliver some lunch to the retired sit-ins. While they were there, one of the protestors left the room to use the bathroom and then wasn't allowed back in for awhile, he said.

In the end, the students left under threat of arrest, but left the lunch with the locked-out retiree.

In the afternoon, the crowd continued to grow outside the office at 55 Whitney Ave. as union officials showed up to make statements to the assembled media.

Bob Proto and Laura Smith, the presidents of Locals 34 and 35, had just left the earlier City Hall meeting, convened by the mayor. They said all sides agreed not to publicly disclose the discussions.

Jackson said because the retirees have been around so long, "they are a real moral witness — they can't be played by the spinmasters."

Bill Meyerson said they are part of a senior retiree group and they put the protest together "especially when they learned there was a \$200 million surplus in the pension fund," while they struggled.

Eight seniors in the conference, seven of them in chairs around the table, with the eighth sitting on the floor as Jackson sat at the head of the table.

Jesse was attended by Scott Marks and Bishop Willie Boone of the Higher Praise Church of God.

Jackson, speaking outside the building, before leading a group of reporters inside, made reference to the anniversary of the march on Washington.

"Dr. King made the case 100 years after slavery," that American workers need jobs with livable wages. "America has broken its promise" of civil rights and jobs for all.

"Here we are, 40 years after that march ... and workers (across the country) have lost their pensions. Employers "are getting more and more," while "workers are getting less and less."

He said this group is inspiring pensioners who have been battling all over the nation.

No one at Yale is scheduled to lose their pension. The issue is on the amount of money available.

