

Labor Consultant Criticizes Yale and Its Unions

By Steven Greenhouse

A consultant that Yale University and its two major labor unions chose to study Yale's rancorous labor relations issued a report yesterday that severely criticized both the university and the unions.

The consultant, Restructuring Associates Inc. of Washington, found that employees said there was a caste system at Yale and that those not directly involved in an intellectual pursuit were consigned to an underclass. The consultant added that Yale was perceived as being anti-union and had a strategy somewhere between containing the unions and fighting their growth.

But the consultant, which conducted more than 100 interviews, also had harsh words for the unions, noting that they often defended the most serious misbehavior and poor performance by their members. Many of those interviewed said that Yale's work force was apathetic and that many employees were malingers who disappeared for long periods.

Restructuring Associates called on the university and the two unions representing Yale's clerical, service, maintenance and technical workers to change their hostile ways and to develop a new, cooperative approach to problem-solving. This, the consultant's report stated, will require a profound change in the way Yale manages its nonacademic work force and the way the two unions represent their 3,900 members.

"A university that prides itself on developing critical thinking capabilities in its undergraduates could reap tremendous benefits

from managing its own employees as if they were capable of independent thought," the report said.

By publicizing some jarring statements made by those interviewed, the consultant appeared to want to shock both sides into changing their ways. The quotes taken from Yale employees interviewed included these:

"Yale is an elitist institution with disdain for working people."

"Our union leadership is lazy and politically insecure. They prefer to hide in the tall grass and snipe at management."

"We're treated like children. Is it any wonder that after a while you begin to behave like a child?"

Yale and the two unions, Locals 34 and 35 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union, issued a joint statement saying that the report reaffirmed much of what the parties already knew. They said they recognized that the labor-management relationship at Yale had for decades been "typically adversarial, unproductive, noisy and not terribly helpful." Since 1968, there have been seven strikes at Yale, the most in the Ivy League.

The university and unions said they "are committed to make this new process succeed, but it will take patience, understanding and the support of our entire community."