

WILL PAINTERS UNION SET TREND IN 2011 NEW YORK BARGAINING?

BY BRUCE BUCKLEY

Union painters in New York City finalized a collective bargaining agreement on May 3 that makes several wage, benefit and work-rule concessions to employers, a result contractor groups hope will set a pattern for other city pacts now being negotiated. The Association of Master Painters of New York Inc., District Council No. 9 of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, and AFL-CIO ratified the new contract after 10 weeks of bargaining.

The four-year contract includes a wage freeze in the first year and wage hikes totaling \$4.50 in the second, third and fourth years, averaging about 2% a year. It also includes a 20% payroll cut for non-Manhattan commercial work. Overtime benefit costs, which were based on time and a half, were cut to standard rates to achieve an estimated 20% savings. The union agreed to cut 10% off health-care costs, and employers will make a 75-cent-per-hour contribution to the Health and Welfare Fund. All maintenance painting contracts will be based on an 80% rate. Work rules were eased to allow variable start times between 6 a.m. and 9 a.m.

Several cuts fall in line with a 26-point wish list—which called for a 20% cut in wages and benefits—drafted by union contractors heading into the bargaining season. Jack Kittle, a district council spokesman, says across-the-board 20% pay cuts were not an option as members have not seen a raise in three years. But concessions were necessary, he avers, saying, “We understand the non-union encroachment in New York, and we want union contractors to remain competitive. At the same time, contractors understood you have to treat your workers fairly. Neither side wants to kill the industry.” Association President Peter Cafiero says, “[The deal] was good for both sides.”

About 25 other union pacts expire at the end of June and July, including locals of the carpenters, steamfitters, sheet-metal workers and operating engineers. Lou Coletti, president of the Building Trades Employers Association calls the deal “an important first step. I’m hopeful it’s a trend, but each trade is so different we won’t know until we’re finished.”