

Small bus strike enters 3rd month

By TOM LONERGAN

A wage dispute that has shut down two of the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority's (SEMATA) small bus operations has entered its third month.

A settlement is far away, say spokesmen for both sides — Teamsters Local 247, which represents an estimated 100 drivers and clerks, and Transit Management Inc., which operates the Oakland County and Wayne County Advanced Reservation Transit Systems under a service contract with SEMATA.

"We've gone backwards," Teamsters negotiator David Schuler said last week.

"We're still a long distance apart on wages," said Ronald Barnes, general manager of Transit Management of Wayne and Oakland County.

THE STRIKE has halted service since Oct. 3 for an estimated 1,200 daily users of the OCART and WAYCART systems. Users are primarily elderly and handicapped.

Neither Transit Management nor SEMATA has attempted to provide an alternative service, spokesmen said.

"We don't really have any way to provide an alternative other than the (large bus) line system," said Michael Dewey, manager of SEMATA's small bus systems.

SEMATA has not participated in negotiations. "We really can't do anything," Dewey said. "It's a dispute between the contractor and the labor union."

"We do not see any particularly strong or clear indication that there are some grounds on which to resolve this thing," Dewey said SEMATA receives "com-

plaints and expressions of concern on a daily basis" regarding the strike.

BARNES SAID "a little, not very much" progress had been made in negotiations since the strike began. Besides wages, a major issue is use of part-time employees.

Schuler said Transit Management wants to "hire as many part-time people as they want" and not guarantee the full-time employees a 40-hour week. Part-time employees have not been used before.

The Teamsters have represented the drivers and clerks since late July. Transit Management took over operating the service on July 1.

Neither side would give details on wage negotiations. Prior to the strike, drivers were paid \$4.65 per hour, but were guaranteed a 47-hour week. With

overtime, the actual hourly wage was \$5.11.

Schuler said the drivers of small buses are not seeking parity with those of large buses. "Hell, that's a 100 percent increase," he said. "I know I ain't going to get that."

A BARGAINING session, with mediators from the state and federal governments, was held Tuesday.

The strike has not affected SEMATA's Dial-A-Ride small bus service in various cities, including Birmingham and Redford Township. Likewise, Nankin Transportation Commission small bus service in Westland, Garden City and Canton Township is still operating. All others are affected.

Small bus service has been provided by SEMATA since 1975. A 1979 strike shut down the Macomb Essential Transportation Service (METS) for six weeks.

Recovery stifled by restraints?

The major dangers to economic recovery are undiminished inflation, renewed rises in interest rates and possibly another turn to restrictive monetary policies that could stifle the recovery next year, a well-known economist says in The University of Michigan publication, "Economic Outlook USA."

Prof. Victor Zarnowitz of the University of Chicago points out that "the rebound is primarily visible in consumer spending (real retail sales) and residential construction. The end of the ill-timed credit controls and the sum-

mer plunge in interest rates have undoubtedly helped, but interest rates have moved up again lately, particularly at the long end of the spectrum, and monetary policy remains a major source of uncertainty."

Zarnowitz suggests that a lengthy period of sluggish recovery should help moderate the inflation rate, adding: "If inflation were to moderate significantly in the wake of this recession, it is plausible to expect several favorable consequences. The recovery, still slow, would be

steadier and less exposed to the dangers noted before.

"The upward pressures on interest rates would be lessened because of both somewhat lower expectations of inflation and smaller rises in credit demands. Consumers would have more incentive to rebuild their savings and spend more cautiously. The effective burden on business of taxes and capital costs would lighten or at least rise less, and investment could revive sooner and increase more. There would be more restraint in wage demands and more gain in productivity."



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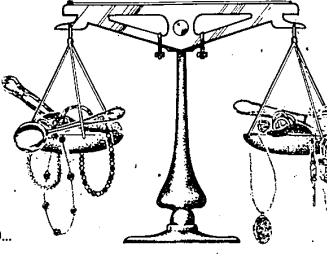
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