

County Cruz Sentinel

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Afternoon

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County Employees' Labor Negotiations Continue

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A strike was authorized by County Employees Association directors Wednesday night in a reversal of earlier action, but negotiations on a contract continued today in hopes of avoiding a walkout of county workers.

"We're not thinking of a strike right now; we're trying to reach agreement as quickly as possible," said association spokesman Bob Muscat of the Service Employees International Union.

Nevertheless, directors met Wednesday night and unanimously switched their earlier opposition to a strike, and decided instead to back the membership strike vote of last week.

The directors also decided to accept the resignation Friday instead of July 15 of Bill Dick, long-time manager of the association who has come under heavy fire from some county workers.

Dick had planned to resign anyway, and a successor manager, Jerry Zellhoefer, will take over. Dick declined any comment on the county situation today.

The nine-member county workers' board will participate directly in negotiations as well, and named Muscat chief negotiator.

A general meeting of county workers has been called for 5 p.m. Friday at the Holiday Inn.

"We hope to have some kind of possible contract ready for them to look at tomorrow," said Muscat, who met this morning with the county personnel director.

Muscat also acknowledged that the county has a point or two in the negotiations. Specifically, Muscat said, "County Board Chairman Ed Borovatz complained that our position has not exactly been clear up to now, and I

have to agree with him. We are in the process of making our points clear."

Muscat said that the exact amount of salary increase and other demands that county workers want will be spelled out more clearly after a board meeting this afternoon.

More negotiations with the county will then be set for Friday.

Earlier, the employees' association board had voted against backing a strike vote of 295-286 by county workers, saying it was not strong enough to support a strike. But this was reversed at the Wednesday night board session after Muscat's arrival, presumably to give Muscat more negotiating power.

County officials were not available for immediate comment following this morning's meeting with Muscat, but Muscat said they are willing to negotiate when necessary, and also want to avoid a strike if possible.



Named Judge

District Attorney Chris Cottle today was appointed to the Superior Court judgeship by Gov. Edmund G. Brown Jr. He will assume the post, which was vacated by the retirement of Judge Charles Franich, in approximately five weeks. The announcement came late this morning from Assemblyman Henry Mello, D-Watsonville.