

Shaw, Teamsters negotiations on hold

WATSONVILLE — Contract talks between Richard A. Shaw Inc. and the Teamsters Union appeared to be on indefinite hold today, in the wake of a walk-out Saturday by company negotiators.

Meanwhile, spokesmen for both sides are saying that the labor negotiation ball is in the other side's court, and union officials are charging that the company — one of two struck south county food processing firms — is not really serious about settling the two-month old dispute.

Shaw representatives walked out of a meeting with Teamsters officials Saturday morning when federal mediators at the session refused to leave. The mediators had been invited to the meeting by the union.

Company vice president Steven Shaw said this morning that his firm is willing to bargain with the union "on any day, at any time, with any other mediation service except the federal; it's really up to the Teamsters."

Shaw said that if the union must have a mediator, it can turn to the state for help.

But Richard King, president of Teamsters Local 912, said this morning that that isn't an option. "It isn't the state's jurisdiction," said King, who said the contract talks at Shaw are subject to federal mediation because the firm engages in interstate commerce. "I don't make the laws," he said, adding, "I don't know why the federal government isn't allowed to sit in (on) a meeting."

Asked if he thought the firm was really interesting in settling the strike, which has idled 1,726 workers at Shaw's and Watsonville Canning, King said, "It certainly doesn't look that way."

Company president Richard Shaw charged Saturday that federal mediators were biased in favor of the union.

"One of them has made statements to the press that we're out to break the union," he said. "I don't think that's their place to say things like that."

Shaw said the company had told the Teamsters prior to Saturday's meeting that it would not negotiate with federal mediators present.

A union spokesmen said, mean-

while, that Shaw's departure from the meeting was an indication that the company, in fact, did not want to negotiate.

"If they wanted to settle this thing, they wouldn't have minded mediators there," said Leon Ellis, a business agent for Teamsters Local 912.

Ellis said the union had voted unanimously not to negotiate unless federal mediators were present. "We decided we want witnesses at the proceedings," he said.

He accused the canning firm of not bargaining in good faith and said, "we'll be filing unfair labor charges against Shaw with the National Labor Relations Board."

Attorneys for Shaw were supposed to unveil a new contract offer to representatives of striking cannery workers Saturday.

The aborted meeting marked the second time representatives of rank-and-file workers had sat down alongside union negotiators to bargain with Shaw officials.

Saturday's meeting came on the heels of union rejection of a contract offer at Watsonville Canning on an 800-1 vote.

Pay cuts are the primary issue at Watsonville Canning. Shaw Inc. has moderated its proposed wage reductions, and the key disagreements there are over fringe benefits, according to Ellis.

Shaw said that the company had been prepared to raise its wage offer for entry-level workers from \$4.43 an hour to \$5.05 Saturday.

Entry-level workers had been making \$6.06 under the previous contract, according to Ellis.

King said this morning that he has had no contact with company representatives since Saturday.

No further negotiations have been set.