

Workers At County Prepare For Strike

By DALE POLLOCK
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"I'm not very optimistic that we'll reach an agreement" is how Bob Muscat, negotiator for the county workers' Service Employees International Union described today's talks between union representatives and county personnel officials. Supervisors were meeting at press time with county counsel, the county administrative officer and Personnel Director Dick Jamison to hammer out their strategy in the face of an

impending strike by 900 of the county's employes in the union. Muscat said a meeting will be held Tuesday evening to give local union "representatives" (generally known as shop stewards) their strike assignments. He also said a strike center will be set up, probably in the Santa Cruz Central Labor Council on Soquel Avenue, if arrangements can be worked out. "We're making all the preparations for a strike," added Muscat, who was sent from Washington to serve as public employe coordinator for the lo-

cal union. On Friday, 320 county employes voted to strike within a week if a salary and fringe benefit contract was not accepted by them at that point. That vote was 320 in favor of a strike, and 110 opposed. The strike vote Friday was prompted by a reported offer of a \$31 across the board pay increase to all county employes. Muscat said today that was never an official offer. But The Sentinel has learned, from reliable sources, that the \$31 offer was one of but five proposals agreed upon by county officials, including the supervisors. "They took one of the proposals back to the membership," said a highly placed source. "It was their interpretation of the best offer, not necessarily the board's."

One other proposal, according to information received by The Sentinel, concerned "cashing out" the present dental plan and using those funds in terms of salary increases, or improved fringe benefits. A similar action was recently accepted by management personnel in county government as part of their salary package.

Muscat refused comment on the number of proposals negotiators were working with, and whether the \$31 increase was one of five alternatives.

Muscat did say that the union is now "approaching 900" fully paid-up members, and that meetings are also being scheduled with other employe unions, to involve them in strike plans.

This morning, Muscat met with Jamison, Pat Busch of the CAO's office, and Mike West, a mediator from the State Conciliation Service. Muscat insisted that these were not formal negotiations, but simply an informational meeting to go over payroll records and "make sure we're using the same figures."

"It was an informative and cordial meeting," the union leader said, "but we still have problems in the way it's being costed." Muscat was referring to the total cost of the salary and fringe benefits package. "It's fully up in the air," he added.

When queried about the status of negotiations, Jamison would only state, "We're still talking."

Workers in the county personnel office indicated they are being deluged by calls from county employes about what will happen to vacation and overtime, should a strike ensue. Sentiment for a strike also seemed especially strong among Social Services employes, according to several observers.

Two-Tier Postal Rates Win Approval

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. Postal Service today approved President Carter's two-tier postal rate plan under which individuals would pay 13 cents to mail a first class letter while businesses would pay 16 cents.

Under the proposal, a new "citizen rate" would be established to reflect the current first-class letter rate. First-class business mail would go to 16 cents. Other mail rates also would rise.

The action by the service's board of governors sends the proposed new rates to the Postal Rate Commission, which can hold up to 10 months of hearings on them. This means the new rates cannot go into effect before next May.

Postal officials told the board the 13-cent mail would be sorted after the 16-cent business letters. But they said this would not significantly slow delivery of citizen-rate mail.

Postmaster General Benjamin F. Bailar said, "I would think the service for all practical purposes would be virtually the same."

As part of the business letter rate, the board approved a two-cent discount to 14 cents for letters given preliminary sorting by mailers before being brought to the post office.

Also approved were discounts for publishers of newspapers and magazines who do preliminary sorting before mailing their publications.

The proposed new rates, extending across all classes of mail, average 22 per cent.

Carter's interest in the citizens postal rate "obviously was a matter of critical significance."

Bailar told the board last Wednesday that the discounted rate would affect about 20 per cent of first-class mail. He said he hoped holding personal letters to the 13-cents-an-ounce rate in effect for the last 18 months would lead to public acceptance of efforts by the Postal Service to cut costs.

Various cost-cutting proposals, including a call for ending Saturday deliveries, are aimed at adding \$2 billion in revenues for the Postal Service and virtually erasing its annual operating deficit.

Under the citizen rate plan, individual letter-writers would have to meet the following requirements: either the return or delivery address must be handwritten, both must include zip codes, both places must be in the United States and the envelope must meet size, shape and height limits of mail-handling machines.

Businesses are expected to oppose the dual-rate plan.

Meanwhile, the Postal Service has raised rates on magazines, books, newspapers and nonprofit mailings.

Under a rate structure approved last Wednesday, rates for second-class books, records and nonprofit items went up an average of 21 per cent. The cost of mailing an average weekly news magazine increased from 5.57 cents a copy to 6.8 cents. Rates also went up on third- and fourth-class items.