

Youths Bitterly Disappointed As Tax Petition Fails

By MEL BAUGHMAN
Sentinel Staff Writer

Disappointment brought students to tears and bitter words Friday as city school trustees, in a 3-3 tie vote, decided against taking a chance that a recheck might turn up enough good signatures to validate petitions for a tax election in the Santa Cruz High School District.

The vote came on a motion by Trustee Keith Shaffer to adopt a resolution for the election on condition that the measure could be withdrawn if the final count fell below the re-

quired 10 per cent of the district's registered voters.

As the board deliberated, the tally stood at 983 rejected signatures out of 3704 on 640 pages of petitions, with some 65 pages remaining to be counted.

At least 2,950 signatures were required.

In emotional tones and speaking slowly through tight lips, Richard Van Deren, leader of the petition drive and a junior at Soquel High School, warned the board that its action threatened to upset a year of work in trying to build communication with students through the Inter-

School Student Council.

"You've lost everything," he cried.

President Don Starr replied that he understood and appreciated the emotions that the disappointment brought.

As the small group of students followed Van Deren out of the room, two girls were in tears.

The board's action in rejecting Shaffer's motion prompted Van Deren to pledge that students would raise the money to complete the canvass of petitions.

"And if," he said, "it is found that the petitions have enough

good signatures, then the students are going to be very angry and the people who signed the petitions are going to be very angry."

His remarks brought a rejoinder from a member of the audience, Hilda Lans, who stated that the "students should learn to be good losers." Earlier she had criticized the board for its procedures in the entire matter, commenting, "You're setting a bad example for students. You're teaching them a very bad lesson in civics."

Howard Gawthrop, county counsel, who was present, told

trustees, "The board would be justified (on the basis of the vote count results) in not calling an election. "But he added that trustees "could act on their own volition."

Friday was the last day on which the board, under the law, could call an election for a tax increase that, if approved, would apply to the 1970-71 year that begins July 1. That election would have to be held on Aug. 4 prior to the adoption of the final budget.

When Superintendent Carl E. Wilsey asked Gawthrop if there

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Ellie Burke Dies



Ellie Burke, former Broadway and Hollywood star, died Thursday at the age of 84 in Los Angeles. She had been in poor health for a number of years. (AP Wirephoto)

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were any way to get more time, the counsel replied that the resolution could be approved subject to withdrawal before its legal publication if the petitions fell.

Pleading for time, Van Deren said that a second check on petitions had restored from five to 10 per cent of the names that had been discarded in the first round.

He urged the board to call the election with the option to cancel it before publication of the legal notice, if necessary.

Shaffer supported the student motion and noted, "If 10 per cent of the people want the election, they should have it." But he also added that he personally was opposed to an election, a feeling that has represented a consensus among board members for several months or ever since they agreed against calling for a tax vote under present circumstances.

Trustee Francis Bell questioned, however, whether the petitions themselves were legal be-

cause they carried no verification by the circulator. He asked for a written opinion by the counsel on the issue, and Gawthrop replied that a report is being prepared.

And Hal Shores pointed out that deadlines and necessary procedures are set up in the law. "It is not incumbent on this board to bend over backwards to bend the law. The law has not been fulfilled. The board has no obligation to extend the time."

Following further discussion the board voted on Shaffer's motion, and, on a roll call, split 3-to-3, with Sara Bunnett joining Starr and Shaffer in support. Dissents were cast by Bell, Shores, and Maynard Manson. Eli Bariteau was absent.

Throughout the entire episode a certain cynicism prevailed among administrators and trustees who publicly supported the students, but in private voiced the hope that the student efforts would fail.

While they agreed with the

students that a tax increase is needed, they recognized the almost total certainty of defeat of any tax proposal in present political and economic conditions and preferred to lay careful groundwork for a later campaign.

And they apparently failed to communicate to the students the importance of careful planning and timing. That mistake was compounded by the words of high praise that the students received at last Monday's board meeting.

The students' petitions called for a 30-cent increase in the

present \$1.32 rate, but, Dr. Wilsey told The Sentinel last week, that amount would have been adequate for only about two years.

The youthful Van Deren and his students, in essence, were the victims of the ambiguities of the law, the failure of the legislature to act on tax reform and school finance, and the hypocrisy that pervades much of contemporary society.

The students, encouraged to work within the system, were given little effective direction. They were, in fact, taught "a very bad lesson in civics."

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