

Employees' 'sickout' ends with agreement on contract

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Santa Cruz County administrators and employees reached a tentative contract agreement late last night that nearly meets the union's salary demands but falls short of their requests on arbitration rights and retirement benefits for certain workers.

According to negotiators for the Service Employees International Union Local 415, the tentative agreement proposes a salary hike of 4 percent in the first half of the two-year con-

tract and of 5 percent in the second half. The union had originally asked for 4.5 percent in the first year. The county had offered hikes every six months of 2.25, 2, 2.25 and 2 percent.

Penny Schantz, general manager of Local 415, said the union agreed to delay its demand of "safety retirement" — early retirement — for parole officers and Juvenile Hall employees. However, she said the agreement includes a provision that will allow either party to reopen the issue after one year.

Scrapped altogether was the worker's demand for binding arbitration.

Schantz said she believes the salary settlement is one of the highest reached this year in California by county employees. The new contract will be retroactive to Saturday — the old contract ended at midnight Friday — if it is approved by the union's general membership at a meeting early next week.

During its closed session meeting Tuesday, the county Board of Supervisors agreed to
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requested a warrant for the assailant's arrest.

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accept any new contract if it is approved by the union before Oct. 16. The board will not meet next week.

Contract negotiations with the county reached impasse early last week over the issues of salary, arbitration rights and early retirement benefits for high-risk employees. A state mediator was called in by mutual agreement and negotiations reopened yesterday.

County administrators and union representatives sat down together at 10 a.m. in the presence of the mediator from the State Conciliation Board. The tentative agreement was reached by 11:30 p.m., and just before midnight all parties were shaking hands.

County Personnel Director Robert Palmer gave much of

the credit to the mediator, Diana Fivey.

"I'm pleased," Palmer said this morning. "Through her we have a good (contract) proposal. She would hammer at one side and then she'd hammer at the other side."

Palmer said the meeting, if lengthy, was amiable and businesslike. He said this morning that the employee "sickout" that hobbled many departments this week appears to be over.

Union representatives also had praise for the negotiations, but said they felt the sickout was key to yesterday's compromise.

"I think it had a profound effect," said Schantz. "I think (the county) was responsive to the outcry from our membership."

Schantz said union officers will recommend approval of the agreement by the general membership next week.