

'No contract, no work'

County workers reject request for extension

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"No contract, no work."

That was the response of Tim McCormick, general manager of the union that represents most Santa Cruz County employees, late yesterday morning when County Supervisor Gary Patton asked if the union would agree to a four-day extension of the contract between the county and the union.

If McCormick's position stands, it means if no agreement is reached by Friday, when the contract expires, there will be a strike

— although the first work day after the contract expires would be Tuesday, Monday being Columbus Day and a holiday. Patton had been seeking an extension of the contract until Tuesday.

County officials said this morning that 74 employees of the Human Resources Agency staged a "sick out" yesterday morning. All employees showed up for work this morning, a spokeswoman for Acting County Personnel Director Mary Lou Alexander said.

Negotiations stalled last week and the union took the county's

last proposal to the membership for either ratification or to authorize a strike when the contract expires.

McCormick went to the Board of Supervisors yesterday to inform the county's leaders that union members had overwhelmingly turned down the county's offer of a 2 percent pay raise coupled with higher costs to employees for health insurance.

They also authorized a strike when the contract expires.

The union leader complained publicly that the county was trying

to strip employees of "basic rights" such as the ability to file a grievance if the county violates state, federal or local health and safety-in-the-workplace laws.

It took McCormick nearly three hours to win a spot on the agenda. He had to file a formal request to be added to the previously approved agenda, then wait for supervisors to act on his request. They unanimously approved the request and McCormick was allowed to speak shortly before noon. His alternative would have

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been to wait until the close of the meeting when the board regularly hears from the public.

McCormick told the supervisors the union was getting contradictory responses from various members of the county's negotiating team.

He asked the supervisors to send Susan Mauriello, the county administrative officer, into the meetings, a request supervisors did not respond to directly.

Alexander said this morning that the county's negotiating team remains unchanged. Mauriello will not be present at the bargaining table.

"We have no reaction to his (McCormick's) presentation other than to say that we don't bargain in public. We don't state our positions in public," Alexander said.

The only response came from Patton who realized that county employees could be on strike by the next supervisorial meeting. His request for a contract extension prompted McCormick's blunt "No contract, no work" response.

Supervisors won't meet again until Oct. 22.