

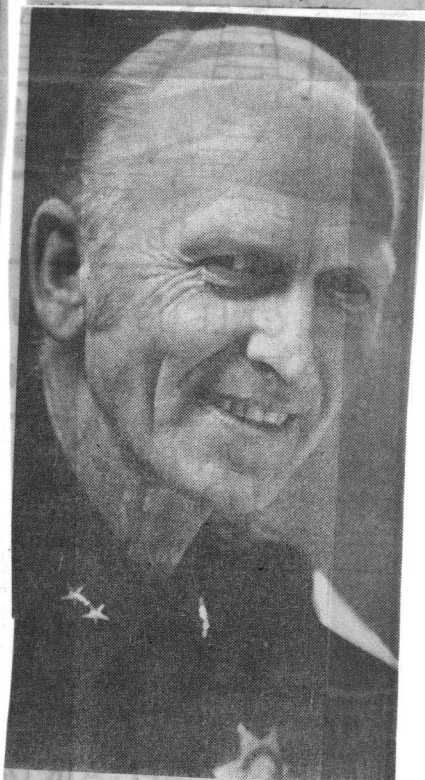
# Strike: Police caught in middle



The children were smiling as they waved. But on Walker Street, a few blocks away, there were no smiles on the faces of four Hispanic women quietly walking a picket line at an entrance to Watsonville Canning and Frozen Food Co.

The women, members of the striking Teamsters union, repeat the mundane routine daily. Their activities are mirrored just a half-mile away, where striking workers, four at a time, pace in front of gates at Richard A. Shaw, Inc.

They represent 1,700 workers who have been on strike at both



**CHIEF BELGARD**  
Facing an ordeal

Police in riot gear have become a familiar sight near the picket lines.

Kurt Ellison

## Chief and his men beset by hostility from two sides

By STEVE STROTH  
STAFF WRITER

Four small children stopped outside Police Chief Ray Belgard's office window on Union Street late Wednesday afternoon. Playfully, they began to wave at the white-haired man in the dark-blue police uniform who was sitting behind a big wooden desk.

**REFERENCE**

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WATSONVILLE  
REGISTER-PAJARONIAN  
November 2, 1985

plants in a protest against wage and benefit cuts. For the last eight weeks, the strike has vacillated between senseless vandalism and boring drudgery. But always there is tension.

Back on Union Street, the little children were still smiling. They were happy when Belgard returned their wave.

Of course, the children didn't know Belgard is Watsonville's police chief. They probably didn't understand there is a strike. And they probably didn't have any idea what Belgard and

plants, things don't seem so friendly anymore.

Officers and administrators are still cordial. But tension is high, and the anxiety felt by officers seems to mount with each new report of violence.

Policing an emotional and periodically violent strike has clearly taken its toll on the department. And Belgard is the first to admit it.

He said the strike is undoubtedly the most trying event the department has ever had to face.

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his officers have been through these last eight weeks — the small riots, the occasional arson, the continuous reports of vandalism and rock throwing, and the hundreds of arrests.

Police have been charged with brutality in recent weeks by the Teamsters Union, which has filed nearly \$10 million in claims against the city and the department. Union attorneys claim officers have been overzealous in their enforcement of a court order that limits picket activity.

With all that happening, Belgard said, those brief encounters with the children are appreciated just a little more than they used to be.

Episodes like that are not uncommon at the police station, where Belgard's friendly enthusiasm has infected most everyone since he became chief almost four years ago.

But these days, those episodes seem less frequent. A more sobering atmosphere has crept into the Watsonville Police Department. With no end in sight for the bitter strike at the Watsonville Canning and Shaw

"I can't remember anything as taxing, time consuming or as costly," he said.

That assessment is shared by Frank Osmer, who was the city's police chief in the 1950s when there was a similar strike in the food-processing industry.

"This strike is much worse," Osmer said. "There's more people, more violence and more destruction."

Just three weeks ago, a fire that was intentionally set burned a building adjacent to Watsonville Canning that was being used for storage by the company.

Three days before that, during the worst 48 hours since the strike began Sept. 9, dozens of fires were set around both processing plants. Police and fire officials were pelted with rocks and a fire bomb was heaved at a bus filled with people.

## Shaw balks at mediator; no talks

By STEVE STROTH  
STAFF WRITER

A meeting at which officials of Richard A. Shaw Inc. were scheduled to make new proposals aimed at ending the strike against the company never got off the ground this morning when company officials refused to make their proposal in the presence of a federal mediator.

Company officials objected to the participation of mediator Jerry Allen despite the insistence of officials for the striking Teamsters union that Allen be involved in the negotiations.

San Jose attorney Paul Loya, who represents Shaw in the wage talks, said this morning that the company questions the objectivity of the mediators because of comments made about the negotiations by Allen's boss, Ruth Carpenter, earlier this week.

"The company's lost confidence in the federal mediator service," Loya said. "We feel the process can work most effectively if the negotiations are confidential."

But one union official said today the union believes the company is not negotiating in good faith and just used the mediator as an excuse to prolong the strike.

"If the company had an offer and was willing to settle, it shouldn't make any difference who is there," said Sergio Lopez, Teamsters business agent. "We believe the company is involved in bad faith bargaining because we were there ready to bargain."

No future talks were scheduled.

"We want to meet with the union representatives directly," Loya said. "But if they insist on having a mediator involved, we would be willing to have a state mediator called in, but not the federal mediators."

Officials on both sides have been meeting off and on for weeks in efforts to settle a dispute over wage and benefit cuts that company officials say they need to remain competitive in the frozen-food market.

Loya would not disclose the details of the company's latest compromise proposal.