

EMPLOYEES — County
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County workers OK pact

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SANTA CRUZ — County workers have approved a new contract which will bring them a 10.2-percent pay increase over a two-year period, and at the same time take part of that raise back to cover an increase in health insurance premiums.

The new pact, which replaces a contract which expired Sept. 30, was approved by a 2-1 margin — 542-267. The vote results were announced Friday afternoon by Penny Schantz, general manager of Service Employees International Union Local 415. Local 415 represents 1,450 county workers.

The ratification came amid an outpouring of anger against the Board of Supervisors, and Schantz vowed in its wake that the union would take political revenge against board members who have been unsympathetic to the union's cause.

Meanwhile, she fended off assertions that union members were angry at their own negotiating team as well.

County employees will get a 4-percent raise in the contract's first year and a 6-percent pay hike in its second, for a combined increase of 10.2 percent over the life of the contract. Workers who attended a meeting Thursday night said they were angry that supervisors, who gave themselves a 12-percent raise this year, had not been more generous.

County Administrative Officer Susan Mauriello greeted the news of the contract's ratification with relief Friday afternoon.

"We're very pleased that they have (approved the contract) and we're looking forward to getting back to business as usual," she said. "It's a good package for the employees, and I think the people overwhelmingly understood that."



CAO Susan Mauriello
'It's a good package'

As for disgruntled workers who voted to reject the pact, Mauriello said: "We hope to regain their confidence."

Employees carried picket signs outside the Civic Auditorium before the union meeting Thursday, bearing messages such as: "Supervisors - 12 percent, We — 4 percent, 1,250 people can: Shut down the county. ..."

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Lynn Garrison, an eligibility worker at the Human Resources Agency, said after the vote Friday that county supervisors ought to be told: "If you can't give your employees a decent raise, then don't give yourself a raise."

Another employee, who asked that her name be withheld, said workers didn't believe that the county couldn't come up with more money. She also said Local 415's rank-and-file members didn't believe their union leaders had pressed for everything they could get.

Garrison said many employees were angry with union leaders for not sticking to earlier demands for a 15-percent, two-year raise. The union originally asked for a 25-percent, two-year increase.

"There's a lot of anger," Schantz acknowledged Friday. But she insisted that the anger was "not directed at the (union) negotiating team; it was directed at the Board of Supervisors and county management."

Schantz vowed that the "power that our membership exercised at the work sites (during the sickout) will be translated into power at the ballot box."

Asked to elaborate, the union leader said: "In terms of playing a role in ... electing and unelecting the Board of Supervisors, we're going beyond rewarding our friends and punishing our enemies."

"People who are elected can't believe they can be arrogant and blind to the plight of what's happening to our membership," she said.

County Personnel Director Bob Palmer said Friday that the wage and benefit agreement would cost the county an extra \$6 million over the contract's two-year duration.

Palmer said the median hourly wage for county workers represented by Local 415 is currently \$11.41 — meaning that half the employees represented by the union make more than that and half make less.

Auto attendants make the least — \$7.17 an hour cleaning vehicles and doing "minor" maintenance chores at the county garage, Palmer said. At the top are four psychiatrists, who currently make \$34.78 an hour, he said. In between are "journey level" typist-clerks, who make \$9.85 an hour, senior social workers who earn \$15.90 hourly, and senior planners, who make \$17.46.

The agreement approved Friday will boost the median wage for county workers to \$12.58 an hour — more than \$26,000 a year — by the contract's end.

Workers will have to give back some of their pay increases in the form of increased medical premiums.

Palmer said Friday that there would be additional pay sweeteners for a number of workers under the new contract. He said the contract provides an additional 50 cents an hour for workers who are bilingual, and an extra 70 cents hourly for workers who can both speak and write another language besides English.

Palmer also noted that the new contract would bring pay for "all classes" of county employees to within 1 percent — "or better" — of the average pay for workers doing similar jobs in a nine-county survey area. Palmer said the county's surveyed included Monterey, Santa Clara, San Mateo, Marin, Sonoma, Solano, Napa, Contra Costa and Fresno.

Sentinel staff writer Jamie S. Cackler contributed to this report.