

Two sides claim win at canner

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WATSONVILLE — Both sides are claiming a "major victory" in Thursday's Teamsters union certification vote at Watsonville Canning and Frozen Food Co.

The actual winner and loser, however, remain a secret this morning, with 1,720 out of 1,773 total votes placed in sealed envelopes by the National Labor Relations Board.

The ballots were sealed because they were challenged by either Teamster observers or those from Watsonville Canning.

Officials from the NLRB took the sealed votes to their Oakland office, and this morning a spokesperson said they will try to determine eligibility of the challenged voters. The spokesperson could not say when the challenges will be resolved.

The election was ordered by the NLRB several weeks ago in response to a union petition.

Both sides this morning had different figures bolstering their claims of victory.

According to the NLRB, 53 votes have been counted — 46 were for no union at Watsonville Canning and seven for continuing union representation of workers at the nation's largest frozen-food processor.

According to Teamsters Local 912 spokesman Ron Stafford, however, "over 900" strikers voted at a trailer set up in the Watsonville Canning parking lot. He said 844 replacement workers voted in the company lunchroom.

The two sites were set up to avoid confrontations between workers and strikers.

Based on those totals, Stafford said the union had won a "major victory."

Plus, he noted, of the 844 who

voted in the cafeteria, "at least some of those voted for the union."

Stafford said the union challenged 780 voting replacement workers. The company, he said, challenged every striker who voted.

The president of Watsonville Can-

ning, Ron Trine, said his figures show 899 replacement workers and only 844 union workers having voted.

He said union officials have "twisted numbers and called his figures a "major victory for the working employees of Watsonville Canning."

Trine said the company opened its payroll records to the NLRB to help determine voter eligibility. He asked the union to open its records, too.

In addition, Trine accused the union of bringing "300 to 350" ineligible voters to the parking lot polling place. He said they either never worked at Watsonville Canning or were retired.

Stafford made similar accusations about the company's list of eligible voters, many of whom, he said, lacked first names or proper addresses.

If the union figures of more than 900 strikers having voted are proved correct, it would represent at least 90 percent of the 1,000-plus workers who have been on strike since Sept. 9.

Despite the challenged election, no confrontations or violence occurred during the election, which ended at 8:30 Thursday night.