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County Pact Averts Strike

By WALLACE WOOD
Sentinel Staff Writer

A strike threat by county employes ended Wednesday night when workers voted 365 to 172 to accept a "final" county pay offer.

Representatives of the Service Employees International Union told nearly 500 employes attending the meeting that they were not ready for a strike, and it would take several months of preparation that had not been done.

Instead, they suggested strengthening the union during the two-year contract period. "Two years from now, we'll be leaner and meaner," said Jerry Zellhoefer, new manager of the SEIU local representing county workers.

County workers will get an extra \$40 per month in October, plus nearly \$22 in cost increases for health and dental insurance. They will also get job protection for "downward reclassifications" of jobs recommended by the County Personnel Commission for the next five years.

Zellhoefer and Bob Muscat, another SEIU representative, said they were not happy with the contract that now will be signed and go to county supervisors for approval Tuesday. "But it's a lot better

than what they offered us the first time," said Muscat.

"We couldn't have gotten more out of them (the county) without a strike, though," Muscat added.

The assessment of strike chances by the SEIU team, who included strike organizer Shirley Campbell, coincided with the ideas of some county officials.

"I don't think they could have made a strike stick," said County Auditor Art Merrill. "They don't have a strike fund, and after two or three weeks, a lot of people would simply have to go back to work because they can't afford to hold out. Look at what happened in Santa Clara County, where they virtually broke the union in a strike."

Merrill added he "has a lot of sympathy for workers" despite his management position, and feared a strike would "terribly divide the workers against themselves."

Supervisors' Chairman Ed Borovatz said today he is "very happy to have an agreement with our employes. It is within the parameters (for settlement) set by the board of supervisors.

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