

Policemen up in arms over Council decision

By KEN McLAUGHLIN

An angry bunch of cops stormed out of the City Council chambers Monday night after Mayor Bill Johnston announced the council's unanimous vote to reaffirm its decision imposing a five-day work week on the policemen.

"I'd like to see all those bastards boiled in oil," growled one policeman.

The council, however, maintained it was only acting in the best interests of Watsonville residents in telling the policemen to return to their 40-hour, five-day work week. For most of the last decade, the policemen have been working 10-hour shifts four days per week.

Police Chief Al Williams, obviously risking the wrath of his troops, has argued that the traditional five-day work week is more "cost effective" and efficient. But the Watsonville Police Officers' Assn. has disputed the chief's argument point by point.

Following the mayor's announcement, a group of about 15 policemen huddled in the basement of City Hall, announcing later that they would take no "job action" until at least next week.

"We'll meet either on Monday or Tuesday," said Steve Dunkin of the

Operating Engineers Local Union No. 3, the bargaining agent for the police association.

"We had a very heated discussion, but agreed not to do anything hastily," Dunkin said. "We've not given up, we're willing to compromise and keep on talking. That's the key — talking."

Dunkin said that there has been talk of a strike ("there's ALWAYS talk"), but that his union is advising the policemen against it because of the strike's questionable legality. (State law prohibits public employees from striking, but the law is commonly violated.)

Police have been working without a contract since July 1 — with the work schedule being the main point in dispute. The council on July 14 voted unilaterally to impose the five-day week after negotiations reached an impasse.

Under the council's order, the five-day week would be instituted on a trial basis. But policemen have labeled the "trial basis" suggestion a facade, saying that "once it (the four-day work week) is gone, it's gone."

The policemen this morning were still snarling. "They (the council) s---," said one cop. "They don't care about the

Police Department. They don't care about morale or anything at this place."

"We are the lowest paid (Police Department) around. They had one thing (four-day work week) to draw people to the department and now they're taking it away."

Another policeman claimed that "40 percent" of the patrolmen had already put in applications with the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office. Regarding Monday night's decision, he said; "It's really bad. You can't take away something the guys had for nine years. One of the things they (the councilmembers) don't realize is that you really need that third day away from the job because this department is so busy. You need to get away from that to rest up, spend time with your family and forget about the job."

The council, meanwhile, expressed hope that the city and police association could work things out.

"We're just a small city," said Mayor Johnston. "I hope we can do something."

"We've got to keep talking," said Councilman Frank Osmer.

Police Chief Williams has contended that the four-day work week is an inefficient "way or providing police

service to the community." Among other things, he said, officer productivity and alertness decrease as the hours per shift increase, leading to fatigue and a greater chance of injury. Also, he argues, the 10-hour shifts cause an "overlapping" of sergeants and personnel, leading to a lack of productivity and "accountability problems."

But the men on the beat counter that officers are subject to stress and fatigue no matter how long their shifts, and that accountability and productivity problems are a result of poor management. They say that the so-called 4-10 plan puts officers on the street when calls for service are greatest and the largest number of violent crimes occur (approximately between 9 p.m. and 2 a.m., Dunkin said).

Dunkin said the policemen agree that there are "some problems" with the present 4-10 plan, but that they feel an alternative 4-10 plan will remove the chief's present reservations about the work schedule.

The council Monday night made its unanimous decision following a closed-door meeting before the regular council meeting.