

# Local

✓ C F Employees - County 10/22/91

## Union thinks it got best deal it could

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County employees didn't get all they wanted in contract talks last week, but the head of their union believes it was a good deal considering the tight economy.

"The money wasn't great, but we all know what's going on with the (county's tight) budget. We squeezed every last drop of blood they had," Tim McCormick, general manager of the Services Employees International Union, said yesterday.

A hectic week of negotiations that included a one-day sickout ended Friday when workers agreed to a package calling for raises of slightly more than 3 percent for the first year and slightly more than 3.5 percent for the second year.

County supervisors routinely approved the contract this morning.

Services Employees International, which represents 1,632 of the 2,100 county workers, sought a raise equal to the cost of living, about 4.5 percent.

Employees were threatening to strike for the first time in the county's history.

"We took the threat seriously from the beginning," said Mary Lou Alexander, acting personnel

director.

While she felt the strike was a possibility, Alexander said she was optimistic that it could be averted. Negotiations had been going on almost every day for three weeks, and a state mediator was brought in Oct. 11.

McCormick, who became SEIU general manager early this year, said he wasn't impressed with the county during early rounds of negotiating.

"I went through 35 arduous meetings" that could have been compressed into two or three, he said.

Alexander admitted the meetings were long, but said they were necessary because they dealt with the touchy subject of contract language.

But, McCormick said, "When it came time to avert a strike, they talked turkey and so did we."

The county will continue to pay insurance premiums for workers, but those with children will have to pay an additional \$3.10 per child per month. The county's costs for providing insurance have risen.

The county also agreed to spend \$200,000 to boost pay for certain jobs that are underpaid, compared to an average of nine counties comparable to Santa Cruz.