

The Brookdale Lodge Chapel lies in ruins.

# Board says strikers can get welfare aid from county

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By DENISE SIEBENTHAL

Sentinel Staff Writer

A person out on strike will be able to collect county welfare benefits if he or she meets the strict requirements of the county's program, a majority of supervisors agreed this morning.

But this agreement didn't come without a fight between liberal and conservative members of the board.

The liberal board majority of Robley Levy, Gary Patton and Joe Cucchiara agreed that anyone out of work due to a strike should be covered under the county's program, just like any other desperately poor person would be covered.

But Supervisors E. Wayne Moore Jr. and Dan Forbus opposed including under the program anyone who has voluntarily gone out on strike.

Moore brought up the issue during the board's discussion on state-imposed changes to the general assistance program.

He noted that strikers had been left off the list of those not covered by the program at the recommendation of the county Social Services Commission and requested that they be placed back on the list.

"I don't consider strikers to be of an unemployed status. I don't want to see NFL players coming here and collecting general assistance if they live in Santa Cruz County," Moore stated, referring to the football strike called last night.

But the possibility of football players collecting welfare wasn't the main concern on Moore's mind. He wanted to be absolutely sure the county didn't interfere in the collective bargaining process between private employers and their employees.

"There is only so much money in the pot. I want it to go to someone who is legitimately needy. . . . I don't want to see government supporting one side or the other in a labor dispute. I don't want people to think they can go out on strike and come to Santa Cruz County for general assistance," Moore stated.

Patton counterterred claiming that by not including strikers under the general assistance program, the county would be getting involved in labor disputes by taking the side of management.

"I think it's wholly appropriate for our

county not to take sides and Mr. Moore's motion (to exclude strikers from general assistance) places the county always on the side of the employer in a labor dispute and that's why I can't support it," Patton said.

He added, "A football player isn't going to be able to come into this county and collect general assistance because this is one of the toughest (welfare) programs in the state."

Patton pointed out that in order to qualify for around \$248 a month in general assistance, a person must prove that he or she only has \$200 or less to live on.

Gwendolyn Warren, administrator of the county Human Resources Agency, further said anyone receiving general assistance must pay the county back by working off his or her debt.

Levy explained that she couldn't support Moore because of her concern that eliminating strikers might be inconsistent with state laws that grant strikers unemployment benefits.

Cucchiara said he was against excluding strikers from the benefits "because it would be establishing anyone who is part of organized labor as a special class not eligible for benefits provided to everyone else."

This statement brought an outburst from Forbus, who stated, "If that's the only argument you can come up with — that this is a shot against organized labor — then you really are reaching into the bottom of the barrel. . . ."

"If you are saying that taxpayers should support someone who walks out on his job, then I can't support that philosophy."

After resolving the striker issue, supervisors then voted 4-1, with Moore against, for changes in the general assistance program resulting from changes in the state's Aid to Families with Dependent Children program.

Due to these state changes, families can now only receive what's known as AFDC-U benefits from the state for a maximum of four months. After that time, the county must support them under the general assistance program.

Warren explained that this will cause the county's general assistance budget to increase by about \$156,906 this year.

And, Patton said, if unemployment continues to rise, the effects on the county's budget could even be greater.