

# City workers stage protest with sickout

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## Absentees cite lagging contract talks, cause strain on Santa Cruz services

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City parks workers in Santa Cruz who normally trim trees and plant flowers were hastily recruited Monday to drive garbage trucks after at least 140 city employees staged a sickout to protest lagging contract negotiations.

No one put the flag up at City Hall. The police department's records counter was closed. No city building inspectors showed up for work. Parking meters expired across Santa Cruz with little punishment — only three of nine parking meter attendants came to work.

"We're doing the best we can to minimize impacts," said Santa Cruz personnel director Erwin Young.

The workers were scheduled to return to work today.

Participating in the sickout were members of the Service Employees International Union, Local 415, which represents rank-and-file clerical workers, librarians, maintenance crews and sanitation workers on the city payroll.

Police officers and firefighters are members of another union. They did not take part in Monday's protest.

SEIU, whose membership includes 380 of Santa Cruz's 680 city employees, has been without

a contract since January.

Union negotiators are asking the city for a 4 percent wage increase in 1995. They have agreed to a wage freeze this year. But the city wants to hold the 1995 wage increase to the cost-of-living rate — probably about 2 percent — with the option of killing any pay raise if state lawmakers take money from the city treasury to balance budgets in Sacramento.

"The city has less money than they did in the past, but they don't have no money," said Sharlene Cece, field representative for the union. "We want to be treated fairly."

In the past three years, the state has taken \$1.5 million from Santa Cruz, a hit which has led to layoffs, cuts in services and increased local taxes.

Young noted that SEIU workers received a 22 percent pay increase during their last three-year contract, from 1991 to 1993.

But Cece said middle management workers will receive a 9 percent pay increase this year, and that it was unfair that lower-paid workers have wages frozen.

City department heads estimated the number of absent workers Monday at 140. Cece said the figure was higher, but she did not have the total.