

Lane County negotiations stall 'face to face'

ANALYSIS
By KEN HASWELL
Of the Emerald

As the Lane County employees' strike enters its seventh day, both sides move further apart, each claiming the other refuses to bargain fairly on the negotiating table.

Last Tuesday, two American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees locals placed picket lines around the county's Public Services Building and numerous other county facilities.

Except for a short office walkout in the county's clerical department in the early '50s, no other strike of Lane County employees has occurred.

At the time of the walkout, the county offered the locals an 11 percent wage increase plus a retention of current benefits, all retroactive to July 7.

The county's Board of Commissioners must consider the total cost of taxpayer dollars spent to reach a settlement with the locals.

Tuesday at 3 a.m., locals 628 and 2831 walked out of the negotiating room in the Public Service Building.

The locals were asking the county for a 14.2 percent across-the-board pay raise which they say reflects a current cost-of-living increase plus a \$21 cost-of-living adjustment to be paid next spring.

One hour before the midnight strike deadline last Monday night, Jeff Schrader, representative of local 628, said it was a "foregone conclusion" that the strike would occur. This leaves the question of whether the locals ever intended to reach a contract agreement that night.

After negotiations broke off Friday afternoon, both sides still

hadn't reached a settlement, and county services had to be cut to compensate for the absence of the 775 striking county employees.

Board Chairer Vance Freeman said Friday morning that the county was operating better without the striking employees. He commented on increased efficiency in the county's operation of the solid waste disposal sites — fewer people are working, but larger loads are hauled and fewer trips are made.

"That's economy," Freeman says.

About 9 a.m. Friday, the five commissioners met in executive session to hear Frank Priore, the county's personnel director and head negotiator, explain the current status of the negotiations.

Afterward, Priore attended a 1:30 p.m. meeting with the representatives of the two locals to present the commissioners' current offer — a 13.5 per cent total package increase that Commissioner Jerry Rust announced publicly Friday morning after the executive session.

The locals responded to the county's offer with a flat rejection and refused to meet further with the county negotiating team, a move that placed the locals in violation of Oregon law which requires both parties in a labor dispute to meet with the representatives of the other side.

The locals said they would meet only face-to-face with the five commissioners and placed a deadline of 2:30 p.m. today on their demand.

But a face-to-face confrontation with the locals could put the commissioners in a position where they would be

acting as individuals, not as a board that has been commissioned to make decisions only after reaching a consensus.

Some commissioners say they are willing to attend negotiations and listen from the bleachers, but they want some ground rules written beforehand to avoid name-calling. The locals refuse to provide the commission with any written ground rules.

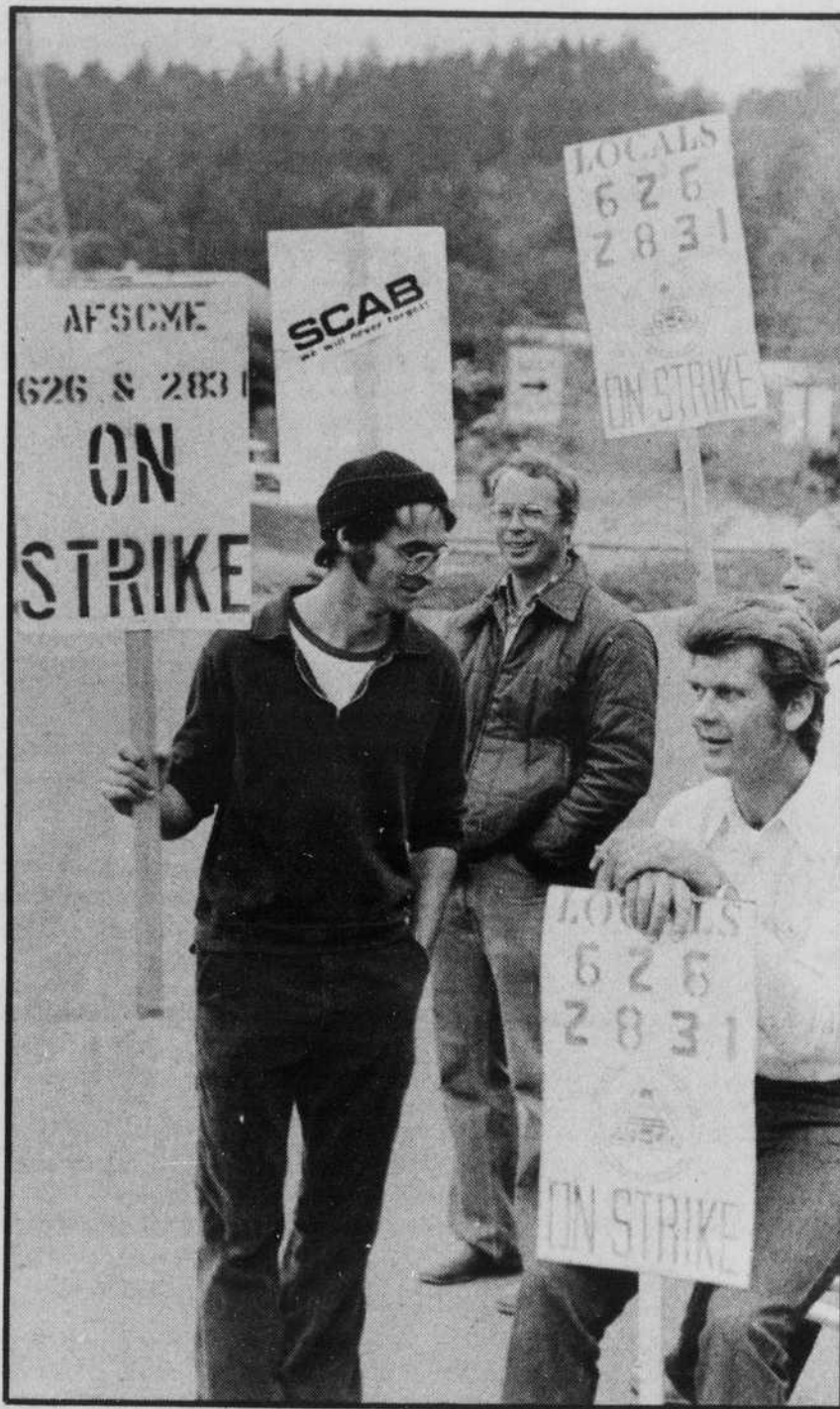
After the commissioners again met in executive session Friday afternoon to hear Priore explain the locals' reasons for the rejection and the demand for today's face-to-face meeting, the board made a public statement rejecting the face-to-face meeting, but agreed to instruct their negotiating teams to meet "anytime" with the locals.

The commissioners also unanimously supported the county's negotiating team, which the locals have been attempting to discredit.

Roger Yockey, executive director for the locals, responding to the commission's rejection, says the commission should be present at the negotiations and that the board wants "to play games and doesn't want to settle."

When Yockey was informed that the commission directed county counsel to file an unfair labor practice suit against the locals for refusing to meet with the county negotiating team, he said the county was acting prematurely. Yet, the locals filed a suit last week claiming the county was not negotiating fairly on the table.

The commissioners will meet in an executive session at 10 a.m. today to discuss the strike and its effects on the county.



Emerald photo
Many Lane County employees have been on strike since Sept. 24 when AFSCME locals 626 and 2831 walked out of negotiations at the county's Public Service Building. Since then allegations have grown on both sides of unfair labor practices.

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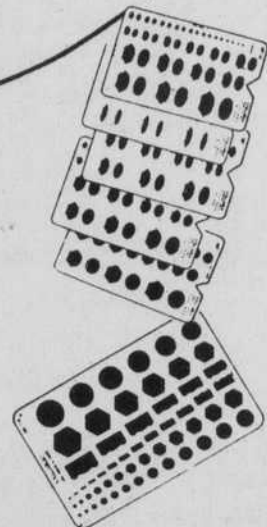
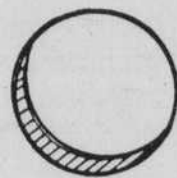
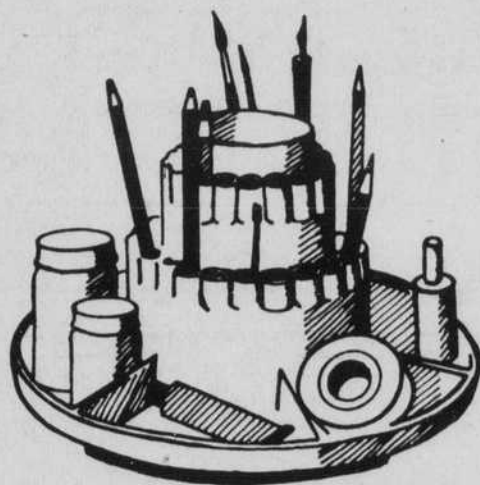
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