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San Juan Teachers' Vote Averts Strike

Lower Pay Plan Gets 2-1 Margin

By Sigrid Bathen
Bee Staff Writer

A threatened strike of 2,400 teachers in the San Juan Unified School District was narrowly averted Wednesday night when the teachers association approved a mediator's proposal for a 6.13 percent wage hike and slight reductions in class size.

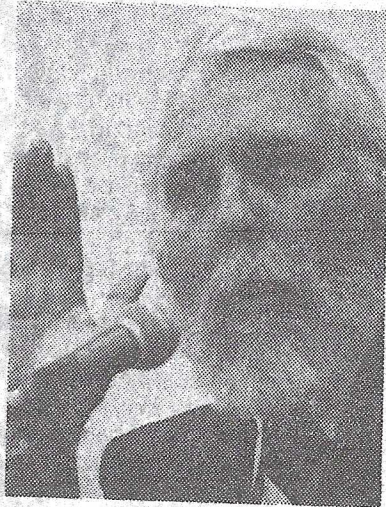
The proposal, approved by a 2-1 margin, is not favored by the school board, which instead agreed to the state mediator's alternate proposal for a 7.6 percent salary increase. Teachers rejected the latter proposal because it contained no improvements in class size or other benefits.

Board president Janice Garfinkle said the board will meet in executive session at 7:30 tonight in the district's Walnut Avenue headquarters to consider the teachers' action. She indicated, however, that further talks with a state mediator might follow and expressed hope for a settlement soon.

San Juan Teachers Association President John Berger likewise expressed hope for a settlement. "We firmly believe we'll end up somewhere in the middle (between the two proposals) as a result of the mediation process," he said.

Association members last week authorized their bargaining committee to call a strike, which was originally scheduled Wednesday and postponed until today so the teachers could consider the mediator's two-pronged proposal.

The district's 1,700 non-teaching or "classified" employees — teachers' aides, cafeteria workers, bus drivers and others — had also voted strike authorization. Negotiators for the California School Employees Association, which represents those workers, met with a mediator all day Wednesday and announced a tentative 7.6 per cent wage



JOHN BERGER
... take negotiations seriously



TONY MUTOZA
... sees significant gain

settlement with the district. The district's earlier offer was 5.25 per cent, and the union had asked for 10 per cent.

CSEA bargaining unit chairman Tony Mutoza said he felt the settlement represented a significant gain.

The teachers association met for nearly two hours Wednesday night in a packed gymnasium at La Sierra High School. Berger repeatedly gaveled the meeting to order, and urged members to endorse the bargaining committee's decision accepting the 6.13 per cent

wage hike.

Depending on the school board's action tonight, the matter may now be referred for further state mediation or fact-finding.

Berger told the more than 1,500 teachers assembled for the meeting that "your resolve to strike has made a strike unnecessary." He also berated the board for what he said is inattention to the concerns of teachers and half-truths about the amount of money available to pay teachers' salaries.

District officials have said they will be forced to make budgetary cutbacks in order to implement either proposal suggested by the mediator. But they favored the higher salary increase because it would cost less in the long run. In fiscal 1980-81, however, teachers association leaders said the proposal favored by the district would cost

\$120,000 more than that favored by the teachers — a point which was not disputed by district business experts.

"The district should be ashamed that class sizes have not been significantly reduced, and that we should pay for such reductions through a cost of living increase," Berger told association members Wednesday night. "We teachers take our negotiations seriously. We will not be bought off by last-minute availability of funds we knew were there all along."

Under the mediator's proposal approved by the teachers, class sizes would be slightly reduced by 1 or 2 students, depending on the type of class

And, teachers would have fewer required, unpaid extracurricular duties such as chaperoning school dances and attending meetings called by administrators.

After some dispute over the final tally, the association vote came in at 1,045 in favor of the 6.13 per cent-plus benefits package, 577 for the 7.6 per cent salary hike, and 93 to reject both offers.

When the vote was counted, Berger read a telegram to the board, in which association representatives said "we look forward to continuing to work with you to provide the high quality of education our teachers have provided."

Later, he said, "This is a great day for



Bee photos by Owen Brewer.

San Juan teachers are down for the ballot count at La Sierra High School gymnasium.

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mediation efforts. Although some members were openly disgusted with the tentative settlement, bargaining unit chairman Mutoza said it represents significant improvements for non-teaching employees.

Their salaries vary widely. Cafeteria employees, for example, make a starting salary of \$581 monthly, while top-scale bus drivers make \$948. The tentative agreement, to be voted on during a ratification meeting next Wednesday, also includes improvements in retirement benefits and payments for required physical exams.

Dennis Edwards, chairman of the classified employees strike committee, said after the tentative settlement announcement, "I'm happier than I was yesterday." He said he will speak in favor of ratification when members meet Wednesday.

teachers in the San Juan district." The district was prepared to continue school in the event of a strike by utilizing some 1,000 substitutes, many of them not fully-credentialed teachers. Substitutes were to be paid \$80 per day. Teachers in the district make \$10,577 to \$23,193 annually. The current negotiations, begun last February, were on a contract reopener clause. Any settlement would be retroactive to the beginning of the current fiscal year July 1.

The teachers also voted overwhelmingly by voice to refuse to start the school year in September 1981 without a new contract.

While the teachers met in the La Sierra gymnasium, which has a posted capacity of 1,370, approximately 300 members of the classified employees association met briefly in the nearby district parking lot to discuss the day's

