

Keep a Good Record Intact

Governor Rockefeller, in a review last month of the first year of the state's Taylor Law, paid special tribute to its success in resolving scores of disputes over union representation for public employes without a single strike. Now that excellent record is in danger of being broken as the result of a bargaining procedure ordered by the Governor himself.

A year ago Mr. Rockefeller unilaterally granted exclusive recognition to the Civil Service Employees Association as bargaining agent on wages and other contract issues for virtually all the state's 150,000 employes. When other unions complained, the Public Employment Relations Board sought to enjoin the Governor pending a decision by the board on the appropriateness of the over-all unit and on the association's right to speak for the workers. The Court of Appeals upheld the Governor's right to go ahead until such time as the P.E.R.B. had reached its conclusion. He stressed that the new contract would hold only for the current budget year, which expires next April 1.

Since that time, a P.E.R.B. staff examiner has recommended that the state's civil servants be divided into six units and that elections be held to determine the representatives for each unit. That decision has been appealed by the state and virtually all the civil service unions. A final ruling is now awaited from the full board. Meanwhile, however, the Governor has begun negotiating a new over-all agreement with the Civil Service Employees Association that would fix wages and other conditions for the year ending April 1, 1970.

The prospect of such an agreement has brought the threat of a strike in state mental hospitals by Council 50 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, which understandably contends that the Rockefeller action makes a mockery of the workers' right to representation by a union of their own choosing. However, the Governor is also on sound ground in contending that he must arrive at some figure for pay increases to state employes before he sends his budget estimate to the Legislature Jan. 28.

What obviously is most needed at this point is a swift ruling by the P.E.R.B. on the staff examiner's recommendations. Unquestionably, there will be court challenges and other delays after that ruling comes down. But it would at least provide the basis for a new assessment by the state of how the interim bargaining problem should be handled.

A strike in the mental hospitals would be a tragedy under any circumstances. But it would be doubly sad as the first evidence of a breakdown of the Taylor Law in the area where it has been functioning most admirably.