

# Was CSEA strike really worth it?

By JOHN M. GREENE  
ADVANCE ALBANY BUREAU

ALBANY — The Civil Service Employee Association brought the State of New York to its knees over the weekend at a cost to the taxpayers of about \$82 million, which the state hasn't got but which it will have to dig up by going to market.

The whole issue will be dumped in the lap of the state legislators when they return from their long vacation Monday. It's not likely they will renege on the agreement. Neither will the 120,000 members of the CSEA.

It was a strike that never should have taken place. It wouldn't have had the negotiating individuals kept their cool, which they didn't. The blowoff came when newsmen wrongly interpreted what was purported to have been a tentative agreement whereby the state workers would get a 4 per cent increase in wages in 1973.

This, so it was reported, was to have been done by "roll-overs," a word that has become quite common these days when

## Opinion

the state's financial maneuverings are revealed. Under it, the workers would have been paid on Monday in one period, on Tuesday the next period and so on until, at the end of the year, the state would be two weeks in arrears in its payments.

It didn't work out that way. Dr. Theodore Wenzl, CSEA president, who apparently had agreed to the arrangement, suddenly blew a fuse and called the whole thing off. He refused to answer questions at a news conference he had called and that was that.

Wenzl was demanding a 12 per cent increase in the workers' salaries. He didn't have a chance of getting it and he knew it from the start. But he had to make a show of strength because the CSEA had come to be known as a "paper tiger" that would roar but wouldn't bite. So he called the strike.

The short walkout didn't effect the thousands of public employees who work in the state buildings in Albany. Most of them didn't work Friday afternoon and it is doubtful that many of them would have failed to show up for work Monday morning, had the strike lasted that long.

Most seriously effected, however, were those in the state institutions . . . like Willowbrook. That's where the real strength of the CSEA rests.

The agreement was a face-saver for both the state and Wenzl. What it boiled down to is the fact that the state has to come up with \$82 million in order that Wenzl could keep his job. The life of a union leader lasts only so long as he is able to get bigger paychecks for his members when bargaining days come around.

Wenzl called the agreement a "reasonable and just settlement." He said he called the strike because of a rising CSEA membership. A public employe who has been getting \$50 a week will now get \$54, instead of the \$75 Wenzl wanted the employe to receive. Was it worth it?

Then there is the additional 1½ per cent effective April 1, 1973. The employes will receive if they improve on their productivity. This, too, is for the birds, insofar as the workers in the state office buildings are concerned. If they improve on their productivity, the state isn't going to need as many of them at the end of the year.