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New contract a coverup, say state workers

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Gov. Carey and union leaders deliberately misrepresented the terms of the proposed contract with the Civil Service Employees Association Sunday to avert a statewide walkout, South Beach Psychiatric Center workers charged yesterday.

Union representatives at the mental institution said they were led to believe that the pay hikes called for in the contract, 9 per cent this year and 5 per cent in 1978, would be built into the basic salary structure of civil service workers.

But it was established yesterday, the representatives contend, that the increases actually constitute "one-shot bonuses" because the permanent pay scale would remain the same and the hikes would not apply to employees hired after March 31.

"If Carey had made this known Sunday, I'm sure there would have been a strike," Rose Marie Truscello said during a briefing at the center yesterday.

Union leaders, meanwhile, called a press conference in Albany to deny the coverup charge, which was prompted by newspaper reports in the capital alleging that since the contract did not affect the pay scale, the bonuses would cancel out normal step increments and promotion hikes.

CSEA President Theodore Wenzl



Civil Service Employees Association, representatives discuss the new contract at the South Beach Psychiatric Center. From the left are Tom Gregor, Marie Genatempo, Barry Markman, Joseph D'Amore, Rose Marie Truscello and Thomas Bucaro.

S.I. Advance Photo by Frank J. Johns

called the reports "wholly unfounded and without merit" and said the contract was "an outstanding labor agreement achieved under very difficult circumstances."

He explained that the salary scale was retained so that state could hire new workers at the old rates. This way, Wenzel said, the money for the salary increases could be spent entirely on the veteran employees, who haven't gotten a raise in two years.

Wenzel emphasized that negotiations were continuing and that union officials would try to develop a second pay scale for the workers receiving the increases. He said he was postponing the membership vote on the new contract until all issues were resolved.

The union chief also said that when the balloting on the contract did take place, he was confident "the rank and file will ratify it overwhelmingly."

The CSEA representatives at South

Beach, however, indicated they would never recommend approving the settlement in its present form. Joseph D'Amore said the members at the center were "angered by the hidden clauses" in the settlement.

"I think there is momentum here and in other parts of the state to do something against the contract," he added.

Barry Markman said he at first thought the contract was a victory. "The governor and the leadership haven't been entirely truthful with us," Markman remarked.

Thomas Bucaro, president of the local, predicted the exclusion of the new workers from the pay increase provisions would lead to the demoralization of the staffs at South Beach and other state facilities.

"You'd have one guy working alongside another who is doing the same thing but getting more money," he contended. "It would be divisive."

The South Beach representatives also resented a provision in the proposed contract that would force CSEA workers to substitute sick leave for the first 10 days of their workmen's compensation allotment.

"In a psychiatric center, employees are regularly getting injured by the patients and they need to know that workmen's compensation is there," Thomas Gregor said. "I know a guy who had his nose broken recently and he was out for 10 days. That's exactly how much we'd lose under the contract."

Union officials in Albany, however, explained that the reduction in workmen's compensation had been negotiated down from 28 days, the time that would be cut under a bill pending in the Legislature.

The Albany officials also argued that the pay hikes in the contract would in net increases for the workers regardless of their position on the current pay scale. The settlement would generate a

14 per cent increment or an extra \$1,400 — whichever is greater — over the next two years, the officials said.

Nor could a promotion result in a net loss, according to the officials. For instance, they said, an employee promoted from grade 1, currently \$5,370 a year, to grade 5 would be making \$6,770 — \$522 more than at present.

The labor settlement involves about 145,000 workers throughout the state — including an estimated 900 at South Beach and 3,000 at Willowbrook Developmental Center.

Ronnie Smith, a CSEA representative at Willowbrook, said his members seem to favor the contract by a slight majority. He explained that many of the workers were unhappy that the settlement was for two years.

"With inflation and things rising so fast, they think we should be able to go back to the table next year and bargain for a cost of living increase," Smith said.