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## Union drops demand for firings

Temporary action calls for rehiring of terminated state workers

By ADAM WILSON

THE OLYMPIAN

Washington's largest state worker union asked the state Wednesday to stop firing people for refusing to pay union dues, and it wants those who have been terminated to be reinstated.

□ The move by the Washington Federation of State Employees was a dramatic reversal for a handful of fired state workers and dozens of others who were facing termination for holding out.

"Very exciting, isn't it?" asked Pat Woodward, a 22-year state employee who lost her job in the Department of Licensing in December for refusing to pay union fees.

"I'm anxious to possibly be returning to work," she said. "But then, we don't know exactly what's going to happen."

No one was sure Wednesday how the state would rehire fired workers. At least six are known to have been terminated for refusing to pay dues, although no official list is kept by the state.

"They've asked us to reinstate some employees that we've separated and stop any further actions. We're assessing that right now to see what it means," said Steve McLain, head of the state Labor Relations Office.

Stopping future firings is no problem, McLain said. But he did not know how the state would go about rehiring workers. New employees have filled some of the terminated workers' positions, he noted. The relief for holdouts might only be temporary. The union says it just needs to correct a mailing it sent to members last May before its mandatory dues will be back on firm legal ground.

"The main thing was just looking at all of our documentation, and when we looked at it we saw there were some technical mistakes," said Greg Devereux, executive director of the federation. "This has nothing to do with the constitutionality of agency fees."

The federation turned in a list of 779 workers out of about 38,000 who had not turned in their union cards in November. That list was down to about 50 workers this month, with most of the workers agreeing to pay.

The union has long maintained that the dues are a fair share of the cost of negotiating contracts, representing workers in disputes, and other workplace services.

But many workers who refused to pay say the union failed to tell people about the dues requirement before a vote on the contracts that contained it.

The National Right to Work Foundation filed a lawsuit in federal court this month against the federation on behalf of Woodward and other workers, which sparked the union's decision to halt firings. The union's action does not address the underlying case, which alleges the union violated workers' constitutional right to due process by failing to send out information about how union money would be spent, and by requiring employees to sign payroll deduction forms for fees, foundation spokesman Justin Hakes said.

Correcting the notices on how much the union spends on politics and bargaining should end the lawsuit, Devereux said.