

the OSEA news

The monthly publication of the Oregon State Employees Association

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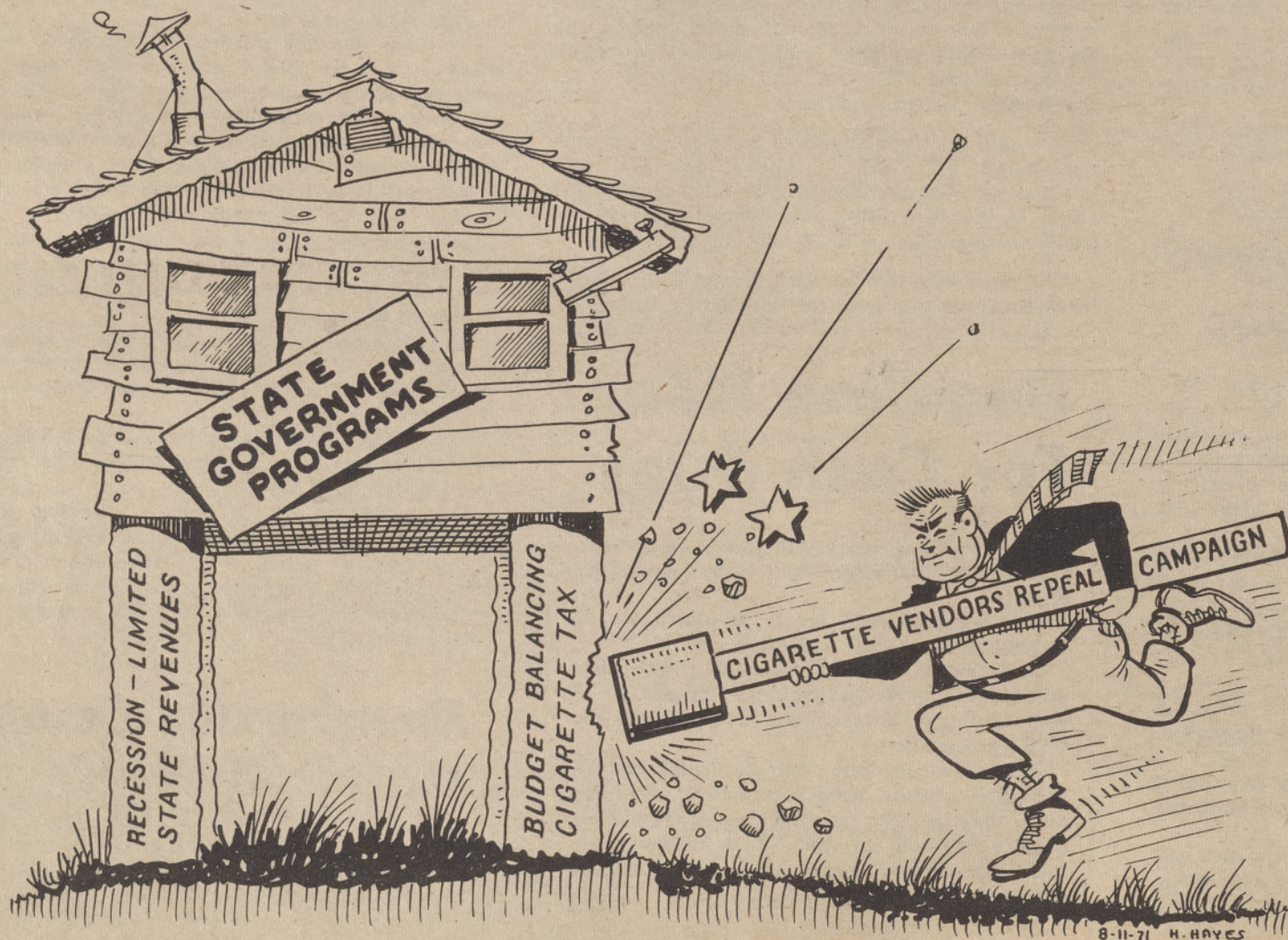
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From the.... Executive Secretary

Public-Private Grievances

The official reaction of the Corrections Division to newspaper stories last week about employee complaints of poor working conditions at the State Penitentiary was that they should have been taken to the administration through the grievance procedure, not "aired at a public meeting."

Actually, the occasion for the comments was not a "public" meeting. It was a regular chapter meeting at which employees were discussing matters for negotiation at collective bargaining contract renewal time. It is not probable that many of the members knew a newspaper reporter had come into the meeting hall and was setting in the back assiduously taking notes of everything that was said.

OSEA does not foster meetings merely to embarrass administrators or make charges they do not have a chance to answer. However, several significant complaints were raised at the meeting and publicized in the press.

A working conditions questionnaire, under preparation for some time, has been sent to Penitentiary employees this week. Response to the questionnaire will furnish the best comment on the validity of the employee complaints.

Another "Fiscal Crisis?"

The dependence of state programs and employee salaries upon an adequate Oregon tax program was made readily apparent in the recent legislative session. It was further emphasized at the latest meeting of the Emergency Board.

A key to balancing the \$794 million state budget for 1971-73 was enactment of a five-cent per pack cigarette tax. It is estimated that the tax will bring in about \$15 million a year. The bill does not go into effect until September 9. A Portland group is trying to gather 26,000 signatures of registered voters by that date in order to refer it for vote on the November, 1972 ballot.

If the promoters of the signature drive get the 26,000 signatures they need, the tax could not go into effect before November, 1972. The loss in revenue between September 9 and the 1972 election would be about \$18 million, according to House Speaker Robert F. Smith (R-Burns), co-chairman of the Emergency Board. The state would be further in the red if the people then voted down the cigarette tax.

Smith and others indicated that a referral vote getting on the ballot probably would mean a special session of the Legislature to balance the budget. The Emergency Board at its last meeting held up two building projects, just in case. A special session would look towards other expenditure cuts, and one likely place would be about \$5 million set aside for mid-biennium state pay adjustments in 1972.