1973 Session Called OSEA's 'Most Productive'

The 1973 Legislative Assemly was one of the most productive in history for state employes and OSEA, Executive Secretary Thomas C. Enright said in his annual report to General Council delegates.

"If we want to continue our momentum," he warned, "we must recognize that success is a condition difficult to maintain. One of the reasons is that it carries within it the seeds of its own destruction. There are seeds of this kind upon which we must keep a watchful eye in the coming year."

"The first is the attitude of taking for granted," according to Enright. "There is evidence that this attitude has been growing among our people, as displayed to some extent during the 1973 session. Those of us who have worked in the legislative process can remember that in other sessions we received hundreds of anxious telephone calls and letters as the session went along, inquiring about the progress of our legislative program."

"This year," Enright said, "we observed that once the pay and benefits contract was executed with the Executive Department and submitted to the legislature, there apparently was a feeling of 'we've got it made' and the calls did not come as they had in previous sessions."

"The calls didn't come even when we ran into trouble after the May 2 defeat of the governor's tax program, and not even although the package was not funded until the closing days of the session," he said. "This was a graphic example of the failure of success, as demonstrated by the fact that this was the first legislative session in which OSEA suffered a loss instead of a gain in membership."

"Next, and closely allied to the attitude of taking for granted," Enright told the delegates, "is the matter of non-participation. This one shows with the statement, 'I'm going to get anything you get, so why should I bother?' Such an employe either doesn't join the Association, or he joins and pays his dues like an insurance policy and expects great results with a minimum of effort."

"Where there is an attitude of taking for granted, with a failure to participate and learn that you cannot take things for granted, there begins to germinate another seed we might call excessive expectation," Enright said. "This can sometimes be the most destructive, because it often leads to negative activity against the organization trying to do the work."

"A former general manager of the California State Employes Association used to call it the 'magic wand syndrome.' It manifests itself when the employe who doesn't participate, who takes things for granted and thinks they are easy, comes to the Association with a grievance. When, regardless of the merits of the grievance, the Association does not immediately get him the results he wants, he accuses it of having a magic wand in the back closet which, for some unknown reason, it won't bring out for him. He goes off looking for another organization which promises him it will always keep its magic wand closet open," he said.

"These attitudes are contrary to the basic principles upon which OSEA was founded and has grown," Enright declared. "Through the years the success of our Association has depended upon strong participation and membership support. Results hard won were appreciated and our members did not expect miracles -- as happy as they were when miracles sometimes almost seemed to occur."

"If these seeds are growing within our success -- and you delegates who work with the peole we are talking about know best whether or not they are -- efforts to exterminate them must be one of our top priorities in the coming year," Enright said.

"In the year ahead of us, the challenges we face will often be harder than those we have met in the past. As the prize becomes greater, the task of winning it becomes more difficult. We will have our victories, but we also will have our disappointments. We will need the support every member has to give," he warned.

"In recent years we have made substantial improvements in the working conditions of employes through collective bargaining. In one large agency, the increase in benefits outside of salary and not set by the legislature are estimated to have cost $300,000 as the result of one set of negotiations."

"During the past year or so, however, the world has been passed among the state agencies -- apparently from the employe relations 'experts' in the Personnel Division of the Executive Department -- that the way to cope with OSEA, with the contracts it has to negotiate in 50 different bargaining units, is to stall and strain its limited staff resources with wordy objections while still appearing to bargain in good faith," Enright charged. "This technique is having its effect. The new collective bargaining law may help, but it doesn't furnish neat solutions."

"Five years ago OSEA in a joint effort with the governor's office helped to create the Personnel Division, on a premise that personnel administration taken away from an out-moded civil service system and placed in a viable management system would be more effective. The hoped for result has not yet been forthcoming," he declared. "The division has turned out to be subservient to budget considerations and arrogant in its inadequacies. We will continue to have difficulties with the Personnel Division and may be forced to seek other ways to realize a workable personnel administration system."

"I have mentioned these areas not only as challenges to be faced during the coming year," Enright told the delegates, "but also as previous successes which we cannot be sure should continue to bear such a label. They are examples of not being able to take an apparent success for granted."

"Success is not a one-shot deal," he said. "More often than not it must be the subject of continued attention over a period of time before there can be assurance that a desired result has been attained."

Delegates Hear Report of $50 Million Contract

The $50 million pay and fringe benefits contract for state employes negotiated between OSEA and the Executive Department and implemented by the 1973 legislature was outlined to General Council delegates by outgoing President Richard F. Young in his annual report.

The pay raises and increased fringe benefits set forth in the contract for classified state employes amount to more than 16 per cent of payroll for the next biennium, he said.

"First, it granted classified employes an average pay raise of 6.24 per cent on July 1," Young said. "Here's the way that average figure breaks down: about 18,000 employes got a 5.5 per cent pay raise and some 5,000 who are in pay ranges one through seven got a flat $30 a month increase. The percentage amount of that increase ranged from 9.8 per cent for employes on the first step of pay range one to 5.7 per cent for employes on the top step of pay range seven. In other words, the greatest percentage increase went to those on the bottom portion of the pay ladder."

"Second," he said, "a sum of money equal to 5.5 per cent of the state's payroll was earmarked for classified employe compensation on July 1, 1974 and appropriated to the Emergency Board. The manner in which the money will be distributed won't as in the old days be decided unilaterally, but will be determined by negotiations between OSEA and the Executive Department."

Young said the contract makes some far-reaching changes in Oregon's salary administration program. "For instance," he noted, "it provides that all state employes will be granted annual performance pay raises on their eligibility date provided they are not at the top of their salary range and provided their job performance is satisfactory."

"Trial service employes who gain regular status shall be granted an automatic pay raise. The contract says no numerical limitation may be placed upon the number of annual performance pay increases that may be granted. In other words, that cockeyed, confounded and confusing 85-75 per cent merit pay limitation has been wiped out," he declared.

"Another very important thing the contract does is to require agencies to measure employe job performance using some logical and reasonable measuring devices such as classification specifications, position descriptions and written work plans," Young told delegates. "In addition, the contract says work plans must be based upon an employe's position description and must be developed jointly by employes and their supervisors. Work plans must delineate job requirements, job expectations, anticipated goals, set objectives and productivity expectations."

"Third, the contract increased the state's contribution to employe medical-hospital insurance from $10 to $15 on July 1. Moreover, it says if the monthly contribution of $15 exceeds an employe's premium, the excess may be applied to family coverage."

"Fourth," he continued, "it pays state employes for one-half of their accrued sick leave in the form of an increased pension. Employes who retire, die, or become disabled are eligible for the benefit. Those who terminate are eligible if they leave their annuity account with the Public Employes' Retirement System until earliest retirement age."

"Fifth, the contract increases the state's vacation leave rate one day a year at each step of the vacation schedule," Young said. "Every state employe now gets an additional day of vacation each year. In addition, two other changes in the vacation benefit were made: the maximum vacation leave accrual was increased from 200 to 250 hours, and employes are now eligible for vacation after six months of employment rather than one year."

"Sixth, the contract raises both the state's per diem rate and mileage allowance. The per diem rate was increased from $15 to $17 a day, and the mileage allowance for private automobiles used on state business was raised from nine to ten cents. The allowance for private cars used at the convenience of employes was raised from seven to 7½ cents."

"In addition to the contract," Young said, "some other important fringe benefit bills were passed by the legislature with the support of OSEA and some very hard work by its lobbyists. One of those bills was Senate Bill 411. It makes many long needed improvements in the retirement system."

"For example, it increases the percentage factor in the formula used to compute retirement benfits from .84 to one per cent; it permits employes to retire at age 60 after 30 years of service, or at age 62 after 25 years of service with no reduction in benefits; it gives employes the option of investing up to 75 per cent of their retirement contributions in the variable annuity program; it increases the annual cost of living adjustment for retirees from 1½ to two per cent; and it increases present retirement benefits from 12 to 25 per cent, depending upon date of retirement."

State employes for the first time come under provisions of the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act, Young said, "thanks to some intense lobbying efforts by OSEA and the AFL-CIO." The act requires public employers to provide employes with a safe and healthful place of employment. Employes have the right and responsibility under the law to notify employers of hazardous working conditions.

Young told delegates that it took the Association's bargaining team over five months to hammer out the terms of the hisoric contract, which was the first ever negotiated with the Executive Department and the first to cover all of state government's classified employes.

"Once that was done it was up to OSEA's lobbying team to convince legislators that the pay and fringe benefits were justified and that they should appropriate the money and pass the laws necessary to implement the package," he said.

"Proof of our lobbyists' effectiveness is the fact that the 1973 legislature adopted the package virtually intact, making only minor changes," Young said.