

OSEA & OSEA—first classified school strike

Oregon's first classified school employee strike reached a successful conclusion this week, with support from many quarters including the Oregon State Employees Association.

The 37 workers returned to their jobs Jan. 17 after their eight-day work stoppage forced the district school board to meet their demands.

The settlement calls for six percent cost of living increases for all employees in the unit, including a head cook with 21 years of service the district wanted to reduce in pay. It also includes a provision to upgrade all district secretaries doing the same work to the same pay level.

It was a united labor victory as other unions came to the aid of the Oregon School Employees Association unit. Oregon State Employees Association Chapter 10 President Dick Downs of Coquille and staffers John Lund and Larry Oglesby walked the picket line in a driving rain-storm with the school employees.

Local union people in the heavily unionized lumber town held their children out of school in a tactic similar to that organized by Oregon State Employees Association members in Baker during the teacher strike in that town.

Oregon Education Association-affiliated teachers were behind them, too, walking the picket line before and after class and offering to help students held out of school to catch up with school work.

Even the students supported the workers, refusing to go to class for nearly an hour one morning and walking the line after school. And a recall movement for three of the school board members was started.

Oregon School Employees Association representatives attributed the success of the strike to the solidarity of the employees -- 100 per cent participated in the strike -- and the support they received for their cause.



On the picket line (from left) Judy Story, Reedsport school employee; Dick Downs of Coquille, president of OSEA Chapter 10; Richard Johnson, school employee; John Lund, OSEA director of

education and research; Jeff McInturff, school employee; and Barbara Pole, Oregon School Employees Association Reedsport Chapter president.

A day of labor in action

Fighting a suspension in the Coquille Police Department, walking the picket line with Reedsport school employees represented by another union and helping the newly-affiliated North Bend/Coos Bay Water Board Employees Association put together contract proposals -- that's how OSEA Education and Research Director John Lund and reporter-photographer Larry Oglesby spent Jan. 11, 1978.

It was labor relations in action -- public sector unionism -- employee representation.

Actually the "day" was an afternoon and nearly half the night. But it was meeting the needs of workers -- on their turf, during their off-duty hours.

POLICING THE COPS

The first stop on the tour, chauffeured by OSEA Chapter 10 President Dick Downs, was a restaurant across the street from city hall.

The issue was a suspension handed down by the Coquille police chief who, incidentally, dropped in for coffee while Lund conferred with three of the officers. Ironically, the first grievance Lund handled there when he was the employee rep assigned to that area, was an earlier suspension.

The 10 Coquille Police Department employees affiliated with OSEA nearly a year ago. Since then, they have won two major battles with the local city council -- over a proposed "Hermiston" or home rule ordinance that could have precluded collective bargaining, and then over ratification of the negotiated contract.

In both cases local citizens -- other OSEA members working for the state and members of other unions, rallied behind them and the council backed down.

But all that is history. It is nearly time to negotiate a new contract and decisions needed to be made on what to propose. Then a meeting with the city manager and the chief failed to produce an immediate result on the suspension issue. That would have to come later.

WALKING THE LINE

The Oregon School Employees Association never had had a strike before. The 37 classified school employees in Reedsport hadn't either, but there they were, in a driving rain for the fifth school day, letting the world know about their cause -- one that would eventually be successful.

FROM THE TOP, AGAIN

The employees of the North Bend/Coos Bay Water Board are no strangers to collective bargaining. They've been through it before -- several

times -- only then they were going it alone.

Now, it was a new ball game. They had a professional negotiator to match up against their employer's hired gun. They had just affiliated with OSEA.

Here was a group that knew what the process is all about. They knew what they wanted; they just weren't quite sure how to go about getting it. Lund was their man.

Seventeen of the 23 employees in the unit turned out. Their contract is important to them and they wanted to be involved in putting it together. And from their questions and comments, you could tell they knew what issues are important and where the problems are in their present contract.

So that was it; the whirlwind day was done and it was time to head for home. And as the lights of the area faded into the clouds, reflection on the day's events provided reassurance that public employee labor relations are on solid footing there, and that OSEA is effectively meeting the needs of local government employees.



Dale Counts (left), Dave Pettengill and Kathy Capps -- Coquille P. D.



Lund (foreground) and water board employees work on contract proposals.