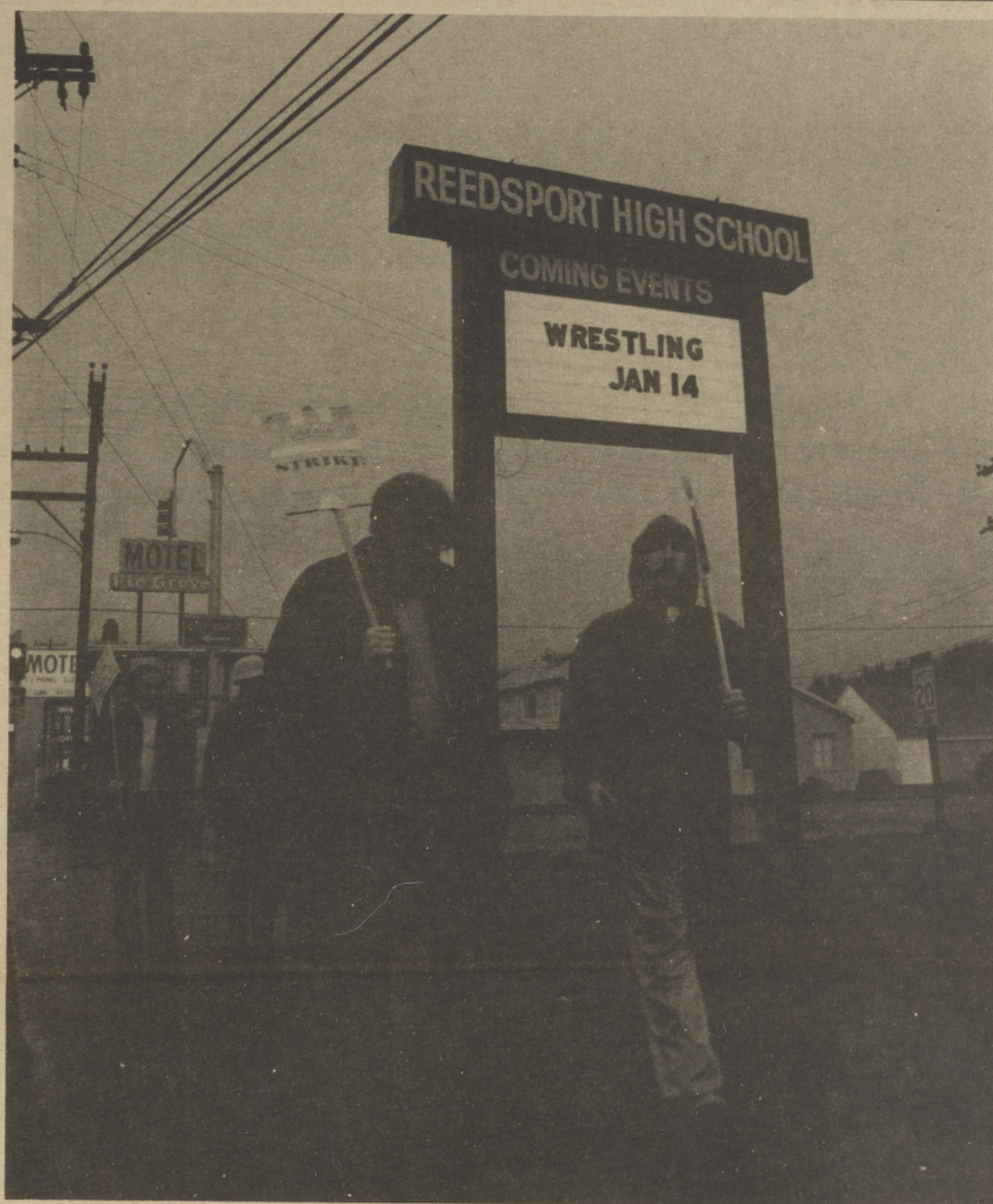




Dick Downs (left in rear), OSEA Chapter 10 president, and John Lund, OSEA director of education and research (left in foreground) join Reedsport School Employees on the picket line.

Solidarity forever

Reedsport, 1978. Ten years from now it will be remembered as the first school employee strike in Oregon.

But it will be much more than a historical footnote. For not only was it the first, it was also highly successful and proved to public employers and public employees alike that collectively, "public servants" can deal effectively with their bosses.

The key to the success of the 37 classified workers in Reedsport was solidarity. When they walked, they all walked. And when they sent out the call, union people responded. We were there. So was the Oregon Education Association, whose teachers in that district worked in many ways to assist them in their fight.

And certainly the people of the community were behind the employees. The strikers estimated that about three-fourths of the people in the Reedsport area, whose economy is dominated by the lumber industry, belong to unions. And their backing of the strike probably was the most significant factor in the labor victory.

The Reedsport walkout won't be the last public employee strike but it may serve as a deterrent in some future disputes. When management knows that it is dealing with more than just one union or more than one unit of employees, it will have to think twice about maintaining unreasonable or arbitrary positions.

OSEA undoubtedly will have ample opportunity to test this hypothesis as the organization grows and more communities have two or more governmental units represented by one labor organization.

A good example is the Salem area where OSEA represents employees of the state, Marion County and Chemeketa Community College. The additional backing of other unions, public and private, would add up to overwhelming support in the event of a labor dispute.

Public employee labor organizations in Oregon are only beginning to flex their muscles, but the evidence from the Reedsport strike shows that when it becomes necessary, solidarity is the key to victory.

(LARRY OGLESBY)