

Legislative limelights . . .

Public employees used as political pawns

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I never should happen but it always does.

The 13,000 state public employees are used as political pawns in a tug-of-way between the governor and the Legislature, and this year the situation is even worse.

Also coming under this egis are the approximate 12,000 public school teachers who also have fought a constant losing game with the lawmakers.

Both the public state employees and the teachers are paid below the salary scale of private industry and most of the neighboring states.

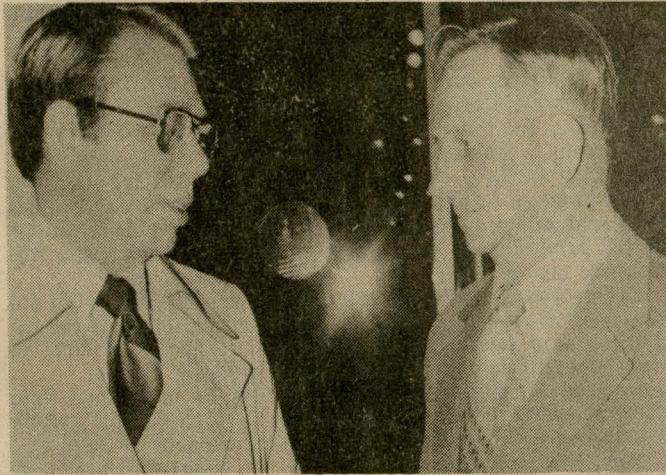
Both classes of workers are making some inroads but they are losing the game — like most people — to inflation and deteriorating economy.

Why the Republican controlled Legislature takes an adversary stand against the public employees is a mystery. Most of these workers are not that politically active, but the maneuvers that go on under the dome of the State Capitol forces them to take a more political posture.

In such a skirmish, Democrat Gov. John V. Evans is looked on as their champion, and before him, Democrat Gov. Cevil D. Andrus.

This year, Evans recommended an 8.5 percent salary increase.

Sure, said the legislators, in all their wisdom. They approved the 8.5 percent hike, but there was a joker. This would require a \$14.5 million appropriation, but the legislators — mostly the Republican leadership — opted to allocate only \$10 million, a \$4.5 million shortfall.



Post-Register photo

Education leaders

BOISE — Two leaders who have key hands in education legislation confer during a break at the 1980 Idaho Legislature. They are from left, Jerry Evans, state school superintendent, and Rep. Kurt L. Johnson, R-Idaho Falls, chairman of the House Education Committees.

Evans complains the reduced amount will eliminate some 300 jobs. It will mean deep cuts in the social service programs of the Department of Health and Welfare. Those who suffer most will be the sick, poor, disabled, elderly and the handicapped — the downtrodden who have little political influence.

These Republicans now stand to lose the support of some 13,000 state workers, who together with their families, relatives and friends, make up a sizeable vote. By coincidence, Evans won the election two years ago by about 55,000 votes and one can suspect the bulk of the state workers' bloc was on his side.

The public school teachers are in a somewhat different ca-

tegory.

The Legislature must be given the nod over Evans, now that the smoke has cleared.

The teachers, as those familiar with the issue know, wanted a 13.2 percent increase, and about a third of them, or 4,000, went to Boise to demonstrate their demands.

Evans marched with the teachers and made friends, but actually he had only recommended 8.5 percent hike, although he said the teachers' plight should be blamed on the Republican lawmakers.

The Joint Finance Appropriation Committee, however, gave the public schools a 10.7 percent jump over last year's budget, which was still short of the 13.2 percent the IEA requested but above the 8.5 percent increase recommended by Evans.

The schools got \$274 million as compared with last year's \$247 million. The state's share from all sources is close to \$200 million, other coming from sources other than state.

The state's portion will total about 72 percent support for schools, perhaps more after all the figures are tabulated. It has long been the state's goal to fund schools more than 80 percent and its share has been steadily increasing in recent years.