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The Making of Militants

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In respect to the country's 3 million federal employees, Mr. Nixon has succeeded where other Presidents have failed. His indifference, indeed scorn, for these passive, rather nonpolitical workers is rapidly turning them into organized militants, whose unions are growing at a record pace.

Mr. Nixon's latest contribution to this process is his arbitrary order postponing a pay increase U.S. civilian employees were scheduled to get on Oct. 1. The decision is simply part of the anti-inflation show the President is currently staging, although the comparatively small amount of money involved will no more curb inflation than a law-and-order speech will curb crime.

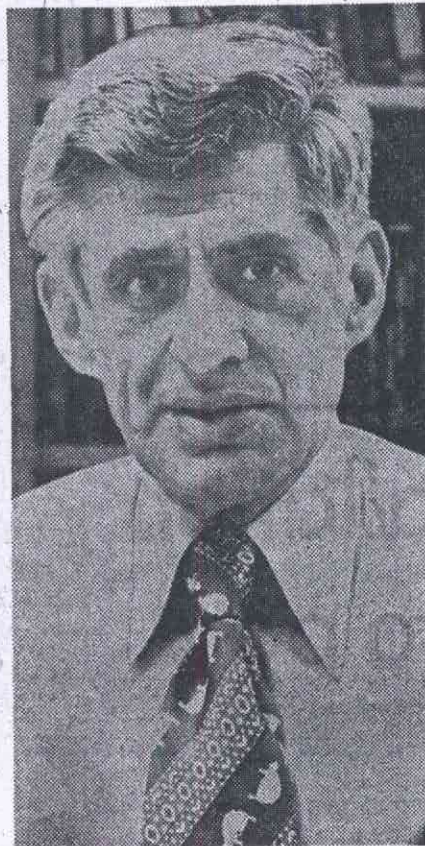
This is the third time in three years that Mr. Nixon has derailed pay increases that were scheduled for federal employees under the rule of maintaining comparability between public and private wages. On the first occasion, the President called on them to give up their pay boost as an example to the rest of the country on holding down inflation.

At that particular moment, however, Congress had voted itself a 40 per cent salary increase and the President himself had graciously accepted the doubling of his own salary from \$100,000 to \$200,000 a year. Today, the federal workers are being denied a 4.7 per cent wage boost while simultaneously an increase of 6.8 per cent for 600,000 postal employees (no longer part of the government bureaucracy) has been approved by Mr. Nixon's Cost of Living Council.

Now there's nothing new about Mr. Nixon's attitude. As far back as 1958 he was talking about "the mediocrity of so many civil servants." He has also publicly complained that government departments are "too fat, too bloated" with employees who "are getting in the way of each other."

Yet, in contradiction to this charge, the latest Nixon budget boasts that there are only 12.5 federal workers per 1,000 population, compared to 18.8 in 1946. It further notes that federal employment adds up to only 18.9 per

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cent of all government employment, including state, county and municipal, as against more than 50 per cent in 1946. Last year, Mr. Nixon's secretary of labor also publicized a new study showing that the productivity of federal workers exceeded the rate in the private sector.

Nathan Wolkomir, president of the National Federation of Federal Employees, says Mr. Nixon "has not attempted to conceal his contempt for the dedicated federal work force." He

accused the President of "unerring malice, animus, and cavalier and contemptuous treatment" for federal career employees.

The indictment was summed up by NFFE as follows: "This administration has already put the federal work force through the wringer of reductions-in-force, downgradings, assaults on the merit system, nonfilling of vacancies, hold-downs on promotions and a steady drumfire of snide smear attacks on federal workers . . ."

The net result has been an unprecedented membership gain among the unions representing government workers. Not many years ago, these unions represented only 12 per cent of federal employees, as compared with more than 55 per cent today. Moreover, the leadership is much more aggressive than it used to be.

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), for instance, was headed for many years by John Griner, who backed Mr. Nixon for re-election last year against the wishes of his own union. He also supported a no-strike rule until the union struck this out of its constitution two years ago. Griner has now been succeeded by Clyde Webber, who lost no time denouncing the President's latest effort to hold up a pay raise.

The strongest and most effective labor leader in this field is Jerry Wurf, who has made the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees the fastest growing union in the entire AFL-CIO, and made himself a liberal force to be reckoned with inside the AFL-CIO Executive Council dominated by George Meany. Wurf's success springs from his knowledge of what arouses traditionally conservative public workers. "Let's face it," he says, "a guy who's been collecting garbage for 20 years is no militant. But when your employer is some elected official who wants to make a show of keeping down taxes, and the worker is the guy who gets it in the neck, you do find him militant." The same could be said of the employer who singles out public workers to hold down inflation.