

WISCONSIN



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of class struggle

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Students and workers fighting transportation cuts at Summerfest in Milwaukee July 9. WW Photo: Bryan G. Pfeifer

Wisconsin public-sector unions mobilize

By Bryan G. Pfeifer, Madison, Wis., Feb 16, 2011

On behalf of the banks, the corporations and the Pentagon, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker has declared all-out war on unions and their allies. Walker's "budget repair bill" proposal, which he unveiled at a state Capitol press conference on Feb. 11, proposes to virtually eliminate collective bargaining for approximately 175,000 public-sector union members. Walker has submitted his proposal to the Wisconsin Legislature with the directive that he wants his bill passed in the Assembly and the Senate by Feb. 17.

In a swift response, unions and their allies across the state are mobilizing to descend upon the Capitol in Madison this week with two major rallies planned for Feb. 15 and 16. Numerous other protest actions by labor-community-student organizations are ongoing across the state, including two major actions on Feb. 14: a march and rally to the Capitol building led by the Teaching Assistants Association-AFT and a rally at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee led by the Milwaukee Graduate Assistants Association-AFT Local 2169 and AFSCME. (www.mgaa.org)

The Wisconsin AFL-CIO is assisting member unions and federations in their protest actions to unite all workers in the state: union and nonunion, private and public sector. Facebook support pages are also mobilizing for the protest actions.

"This budget repair bill is an all-out assault on you, your families, your careers, your rights and your union. Walker keeps talking about the 'good and decent people who work for the State of Wisconsin,' but his actions speak a different message of divisiveness, cronyism and servitude," AFSCME Council 24 wrote in a letter to its members after Walker's Feb. 11 press conference. (www.wseu-sepac.org)

Some of the provisions in Walker's bill include:

"Collective bargaining: The bill would make various changes to limit collective bargaining for most public employees to wages. Total wage increases could not exceed a cap based on the consumer price index unless approved by referendum. Contracts would be limited to one year and wages would be frozen until the new contract is settled. Collective bargaining units are required to take annual votes to maintain certification as a union. Employers would be prohibited from collecting union dues and members of collective bargaining units would not be required to pay dues. These changes take effect upon the expiration of existing contracts. Local law enforcement and fire employees, and state troopers and inspectors would be exempt from these changes;" (tinyurl.com/4t4oozh)

The unions in Wisconsin see their fight as part of a national fight, as many other governors also have "right-to-work," deregulation and privatization legislation that they want implemented. If Walker's proposals are passed, they will

have an especially negative effect on women, workers of color, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender workers.

“It is time for working people to come together, put aside our petty differences and confront the corporate and right-wing assault on our justice, dignity, prosperity, way of life and ultimately, our families. This is a fight over who controls and governs our country and its people: corporate and right-wing America, or the multitude of working people,” Dave Boucher of UAW Local 833 told this writer.

For a full list of protest actions and for more information: www.scfl.org. □

Wisconsin workers demand: ‘Kill the bill’



An estimated 15,000 workers from all over Wisconsin descended upon the state Capitol in Madison Feb. 15 for an all-day protest against a proposed bill that attacks the rights of public-sector workers, especially the right to collective bargaining. Not only were the workers outside, but workers inside the Capitol took four floors and legislators’ offices. Firefighters and teachers organized strong delegations along with youth and students. Elsewhere in the state, there were student walkouts from schools. A number of the workers’ placards paid homage to the struggle of the Egyptian people.

— Photo/story: Bryan G. Pfeifer

Tens of thousands liberate state Capitol in Madison to oppose anti-worker legislation

By Bryan G. Pfeifer, Madison, Wis., Feb 17, 2011

Feb. 16 — Since Feb. 14, tens of thousands of students, workers and other community members have liberated the Wisconsin Capitol in Madison in response to Gov. Scott Walker’s “budget repair” bill, which would eliminate collective bargaining rights for 175,000 public sector union workers statewide.

Gilbert Johnson, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 82 at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, told this reporter: “We’re repulsed by the efforts of the current administration to strip us of our rights and dignity. The increasing protests statewide, and especially at the state Capitol, are exactly what’s needed to kill Gov. Walker’s bill, which is a union-busting and anti-worker attack. The resistance by the people of Wisconsin is inspiring and instilling hope in poor and working people all over the country. We need a constant stream of people going to the Capitol to stop this bill and for all to come out to the emergency rally Thursday.”

As of this writing, Walker’s budget bill is in the Joint Finance Committee, while hundreds of students and others are camping overnight inside the Capitol. A people’s filibuster took place for more than 20 hours Feb. 15-16. On one occasion in the late evening of Feb. 15, when the committee attempted to shut down public comment, hundreds of angry protesters led by students chanted “We will speak” and “Let us in.” They won more time—public comments continued until 2:30 a.m.

If the committee approves Walker’s bill, it goes to the Senate, where it is expected to be passed, and then on to the Assembly. The bill could come before the Senate as early as tomorrow. Those protesting have pledged the Senate and Assembly will be faced with mass resistance of various kinds if they attempt to pass the bill.

Both yesterday and today, hundreds of buses traveled to Madison from all across the state for noon rallies at the Capitol. The thousands who traveled to Madison occupied the Capitol building both days, taking over all four floors, encircling the Capitol in moving pickets and holding candlelight vigils. Inside, thousands more lobbied legislators, joined protests and drumming circles and sang. The Wisconsin AFL-CIO says that 20,000 descended on the Capitol Feb. 15 and 50,000 today. On Feb. 17 union and student organizers expect even bigger crowds to come from across Wisconsin and beyond.

Today all the K-12 teachers and students in Madison walked out and joined in solidarity at the Capitol. There have also been “teach-outs” at UW-Madison.

Delegations of firefighters also joined the protests yesterday and today in a notable act of poignant solidarity, as they are exempt from the dire effects of Walker's bill. They received an electric response from the crowds, as have the youth and students, who are playing a critical role in numerous areas.

The week started with pickets at legislators' homes Feb. 13. The next day simultaneous protest actions as the Milwaukee Graduate Assistants Association-American Federation of Teachers at UW-Milwaukee sponsored a rally and the Teaching Assistants Association-AFT at UW-Madison rallied on campus and then marched to the Capitol.

Support builds from labor & community groups

On Tuesday, union teachers and others picketed Walker's house.

Leading forces in the protest are youth and students, AFSCME, Wisconsin Education Association Council, Wisconsin AFL-CIO and AFT Wisconsin. An impressive media communications network of web pages, email, Twitter, YouTube, texting, phone trees and more is spreading the word about the resistance and encouraging people to come to the Capitol.

Chants such as "Kill the bill," "Hands off workers, make the banks pay," "Who's got the power: We've got the power" and many others are echoing off the walls inside and outside the Capitol.

Statements and resolutions of support for Wisconsin workers and students are coming in from across the country. The San Francisco Labor Council, the Tucson May 1st Coalition, United Electrical Workers Local 150, Black Workers for Justice, South Bronx Community Congress, Michigan Emergency Committee Against War and Injustice, Students for a Democratic Society, Fight Imperialism, Stand Together, Moratorium NOW! Coalition to Stop Foreclosures, Evictions & Utility Shutoffs, and scores of other unions, student and community organizations have pledged support.

A Bail Out the People Movement solidarity statement issued on Feb.14 declared: "What the rich and the powerful want to do is strip us all of our rights and to make all workers into virtual slaves, both in the public sector and private. The so-called deficit crisis is being used as an excuse to attack workers in every sector, from private to public. We say no! Make the banks get off of the money they are hoarding. Tax them and the rich! Take the trillions of dollars wasted on war and propping up dictatorships and spend it on the people. We should tell Gov. Scott Walker: Hands off the public workers or we will do what the youth and people of Egypt did! Come and stay at Wisconsin's Capitol in the thousands until they listen! We will take up the legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and march, sit-in and link arms with our sisters and brothers until justice is won." (www.bailoutpeople.org).

For ongoing updates and information, www.wseu-sepac.org, www.wisafclcio.org and www.weac.org/Home.aspx. □

From a youth organizer in Madison: 'Solidarity of workers and students cannot be broken'

By Ben Carroll, Madison, Wis., Feb 21, 2011

Feb. 21 — Inside the state Capitol building in Madison, Wis., the halls normally filled with politicians and corporate lobbyists are now occupied by thousands of people. Banners and posters with messages of solidarity and slogans denouncing Gov. Scott Walker's attack on the public sector hang from every wall.

Chants of "power to the people" and drumming fill the building from the early hours of the morning until late at night. The energy in the building is absolutely electric and all who are participating in the occupation and mass demonstrations are determined to carry the struggle forward until the anti-union bill is defeated.

Young people and students are playing a decisive role in the historic struggle that is developing in Wisconsin. The occupation — which is entering its second week now — has been led by young workers, high school students, undergraduates and the graduate student unions.

Students have developed food distribution centers, information points, medical teams and infrastructure. A people's assembly was held to make collective decisions about how to keep and build the people's control of the capitol building. The struggle has been a tremendous teacher, in helping to shape and guide the development of the occupation.

Every day that the struggle moves forward, more and more young people are flooding Madison to stand with workers against the right wing's attack on the public sector. This struggle has lit a fire in the hearts and minds of young people and awakened a spirit of resistance. So many young people that filled the halls of the Capitol, or have been marching in the streets shoulder to shoulder with workers, have remarked how this type of militant action has been long overdue and that they are determined to keep fighting until these right-wing attacks are defeated.

Solidarity of workers and students cannot be broken

Tens of thousands of students from all over Wisconsin, and indeed from all over the Midwest, have mobilized to participate in the many rallies and demonstrations that have been organized during the past week to help hold the occupation at the Capitol building. High school students in Madison organized walkouts and miles-long marches from their high schools to join their teachers down at the Capitol. Student organizations such as Students for a Democratic Society, Student Labor Action Coalition, Voces de la Frontera and the United Council, among

others, have been helping to mobilize students to the Capitol and build solidarity for public sector workers. They've organized walkouts at a number of University of Wisconsin campuses, including more than 3,000 students at UW-Madison, organized by SDS. The graduate student unions maintain an organizing center in the Capitol building that runs around the clock, and student organizations help to staff and organize out of it. Students also helped to lead a demonstration against the Tea Party on Feb. 19 that drew out 100,000 trade unionists and students.

On a day this writer spent doing outreach at UW-Madison's campus, there was near universal support for the workers and students fighting back against these attacks. Almost everyone we spoke with had been participating in the ongoing demonstrations and declared their intentions to return. In an instant, this struggle has opened up the political consciousness of so many young people and has given life to an urgency to fight back.

Struggle about more than this one bill

While the primary task at hand is to kill the "budget repair" bill that would eliminate collective bargaining, the grievances of young people extend far beyond that. In many ways, this bill was the tipping point that drove so many young people into the streets. Outraged by the injustices and inhumanities of this capitalist system, they have had enough.

So many remarked that what is happening now in Madison is exactly the kind of fightback that working people have needed to face the onslaught of



*The writer, holding banner at right, at June 4 Education rally in Milwaukee.
WW Photo: Bryan G. Pfeifer*



Youth Empowered In The Struggle, the youth group of Voces de la Frontera at education rally in Milwaukee June 4. WW Photo: Bryan G. Pfeifer

attacks against the public sector that have occurred since 2007, the beginning of the current capitalist crisis. It was clear to all how this bill is the latest in a series of attacks on workers and students — from the attacks on public education to the millions of workers who are unemployed with no end in sight; the lack of health care for so many; foreclosures; and the list goes on.

Many people pointed out how the banks are sitting on trillions of dollars and how the U.S. continues to spend billions on wars, occupations and bailouts, yet Walker and every other state government around the country claims that cuts are necessary. It is the capitalist system, so many occupying the Capitol said, that is the real problem. Many here say we need a revolutionary transformation of society that puts people's needs first, and not profit.

Young workers and students are determined to keep the Capitol occupied and in the hands of the people. They are continuing to work around the clock to defend the occupation from any police provocations, and to build it and bring more young people in to help hold the building. This is viewed as one of the most urgent tasks for young people at the moment.

The fighting spirit and the solidarity of workers and students in Wisconsin should serve as a great inspiration and example to all those fighting the attacks on the public sector and on all workers.

The writer is an organizer with the Fight Imperialism, Stand Together youth group in Raleigh, N.C. □

FIST proposes national student strike: 'FIGHT LIKE A WISCONSINITE'

Feb 23, 2011

The following is a statement from the Fight Imperialism, Stand Together youth organization.

Workers and students in Wisconsin have joined together, igniting a valiant struggle against a bill designed to eliminate collective bargaining rights for public sector workers in the state. Other features of the bill that Gov. Scott Walker of Wisconsin has proposed are to raise health care premiums and the workers' contributions to their pensions.

Before the bill went to committee, where it would have to pass before being voted on by the legislature, thousands of workers, students and community members converged on the statehouse in Madison. Since that very first day, the numbers have grown at every protest, reaching over 100,000, while thousands of students and workers have occupied the inside of the state Capitol building.

Fifteen school districts have been shut down, including in Madison and Milwaukee. Teachers have called in sick. Students began walking out of class last week. At high schools throughout Madison, students walked out in the hundreds per school before the schools were closed down. Students in the University of Wisconsin system have called for strikes and walked out of class.

Workers and students have blocked elevators and stairwells, shouted down meetings, occupied offices and engaged in other acts to disrupt business at the Capitol, in spite of Gov. Walker's threat to call in the National Guard.

The militancy of the Wisconsin actions has inspired students and workers across the country. In response to a similar bill by the right-wing governor of Ohio, workers there have descended on the statehouse in Columbus. Dozens of solidarity actions are being held around the country and activists, unions and students, who are gearing up to fight austerity measures in almost 40 states, are watching and planning to fight back.

Like many other state governments across the country, the state of Wisconsin is crying broke. Walker has said that there is no money, and the state deficit needs to be fixed. Like many Democratic and Republican politicians, Walker, along with the corporate media, has painted public sector workers as greedy, as the haves, and private sector workers as the have nots.

In an ironic twist, the workers are being made pariahs and the cause of budget crises that are the latest manifestation of the overall crisis of the capitalist system.

Workers in the state where collective bargaining rights for public sector workers were first won in the late 1950s are to blame, it's said, not the rich and

superrich, not the bankers and financial institutions, not the hedge funds.

The reality is that the loss of revenue to the states and federal government is directly tied to the capitalist crisis, which has caused the economy to shed more than 8 million jobs. While companies have reaped record profits during the so-called recovery, jobs are scarcer than they have been for decades. Wages have gone down, and many of the available jobs are temporary.

Forty-four states are crying over deficits totaling more than \$125 billion and are seeking to severely cut back on vital services and to lay off public sector workers.

These deficits represent the IMFization of the U.S. All the while banks and financial institutions have received trillions of dollars in bailouts, and hedge funds are robbing monies for education by bankrolling the charterization and privatization of the public school systems. Trillions go to wage war in the interest of corporations and the rich ruling elite of this country.

The rich, superrich and corporations continue to receive huge tax breaks. In Wisconsin, Gov. Walker gave tax breaks worth \$140 million to Wal-Mart. This money would more than close the \$130 million deficit that he is now claiming.

What must be done? A war has been unleashed on the workers. The rights and wages of workers are being viciously curtailed. There is no future in worrying about the profitability of corporations because profit is derived from exploitation. There is no future in workers and students worrying about the deficits of local, state or the federal government all the while that trillions are used to wage war on Third World countries to steal their resources.

Workers and students need to fight back, to mobilize and be in the streets. Fight like a Wisconsinite! Fight like an Egyptian! Fight for the wealth our labor creates! Build student and worker fightback committees to struggle for jobs, education and health care for all. Fight against racism, anti-immigrant, anti-Islam bigotry, sexism and homophobia! On to a student strike for March 31! On to May Day! All power to the workers and students! □



WW photo: Bryan G. Pfeifer

Packers athletes: ‘Public workers are Wisconsin’s champions’

By Monica Moorehead, Feb 23, 2011

The heroic worker and student takeover of the Wisconsin State Capitol in Madison, which is entering its second week, has evoked solidarity throughout many sectors of U.S. society; athletes are no exception. The Green Bay Packers, the only publicly owned team in the National Football Association and winners of Super Bowl XLV, are based in the working-class city of Green Bay, Wis. Past and present Packer members — Curtis Fuller, Chris Jackie, Charles Jordan, Bob Long, Steve Okoniewski, Brady Poppinga and Jason Spitz — issued the following solidarity statement on Feb. 15, the second day of the Wisconsin Capitol takeover.

We know that it is teamwork on and off the field that makes the Packers and Wisconsin great. As a publicly-owned team we wouldn’t have been able to win the Super Bowl without the support of our fans.

It is the same dedication of our public workers every day that makes Wisconsin run. They are the teachers, nurses and child care workers who take care of us and our families. But now in an unprecedented political attack Governor Walker is trying to take away their right to have a voice and bargain at work.

The right to negotiate wages and benefits is a fundamental underpinning of our middle class. When workers join together it serves as a check on corporate power and helps ALL workers by raising community standards. Wisconsin’s long standing tradition of allowing public sector workers to have a voice on the job has worked for the state since the 1930s. It has created greater consistency in the relationship between labor and management and a shared approach to public work.

These public workers are Wisconsin’s champions every single day and we urge the Governor and the State Legislature to not take away their rights. □

Football union supports Wisconsin workers

Following statement was issued on Feb. 15.

The NFL Players Association will always support efforts protecting a worker’s right to join a union and collectively bargain. Today, the NFLPA stands in solidarity with its organized labor brothers and sisters in Wisconsin..

Message from Cairo to Madison

Feb 23, 2011

Some of the Egyptians who participated in the uprising there have been supportive of the workers' struggle in Madison, Wis., as can be seen in the photo here. Other have donated funds to buy pizzas in Madison and have them sent to the workers and students at the state Capitol.



Another example comes from CTUWS, an umbrella advocacy organization for independent unions in Egypt. The CTUWS suffered repeated harassment and attacks by the Mubarak regime and played a role in its overthrow. Kamal Abbas is general coordinator of the CTUWS and had been arrested and threatened numerous times by the Mubarak dictatorship.

In a message to the people occupying the Capitol, Abbas said: "I speak to you from a place close to Tahrir Square in Cairo, heart of the Revolution in Egypt. Here in 'Liberation Square' many of our youth paid with their lives and blood in the struggle for our just rights.

"We stand with you as you stood with us. No power can challenge the will of people who believe in their rights, raise their voices loud and clear, and struggle against exploitation.

"No one believed our revolution could succeed against the strongest dictatorship in the region. Yet in 18 days the revolution achieved the victory of the people. When the working class of Egypt joined the revolution on Feb. 9, the dictatorship was doomed and victory became inevitable.

"Victory always belongs to the people who stand firm and demand their just rights. Don't waiver. Don't give up on your rights. We and all the people of the world stand on your side and give you our full support. As our just struggle for freedom, democracy and justice succeeded, your struggle will succeed.

"Today is the day of the American workers. We salute you! Victory belongs to all the people of the world, who are fighting against exploitation, and for their just rights." Abbas saluted other peoples in the North African and West Asian region fighting to remove their rulers. □

WWP salutes heroic occupation

By Sharon Black, Madison, Wis., Feb 23, 2011

Feb. 22 — Workers World Party salutes the workers of Wisconsin who through their sacrifice and fortitude are showing the way for workers everywhere!

The occupation of the Wisconsin Capitol is in its eighth day. The Wisconsin South Central Labor Council has voted to endorse a general strike of its members if Gov. Scott Walker passes the budget bill that contains provisions that would destroy collective bargaining for public sector unions.

It was the energy of the students and teachers that served as the spark that lit these amazing developments in Wisconsin. These have ramifications for not only public and private sector workers and their unions but ultimately all of the working class, young and old, jobless and working of all nationalities.

Make no mistake, the pivotal issue is union-busting, but in essence what has been unleashed is the pent-up desire of the masses of people to push back against the right-wing onslaught and what has been characterized so well on signs here: “The war on the workers.”

An unprecedented 100,000 people marched in Madison on Feb. 19 in contrast to a small group of Tea Party supporters who drew less than 2,000 people. Over the weekend, local papers trumpeted that snow and bad weather would decimate protests but instead workers took their marches to the inside of the Capitol.



WW photo: Sharon Black



WW photo: Bryan G. Pfeifer

Inside the Capitol, solidarity is growing. Firefighters have slept alongside high school and college students. Our own reporters are sharing the floor with other seasoned trade unionists who have been in the trenches fighting labor battles.

Holding and occupying the Capitol has been a key component in this critical labor battle. And so far the fortitude of the students and workers to continue has remained strong.

The occupation of the Capitol and the massive protests, including the support of unions and workers nationally, have created a euphoric atmosphere that has given hope to everyone who has supported the workers, including immigrant rights groups.

Local residents have opened their homes to those occupying the Capitol offering hot showers. Pizza has been ordered and paid for by supporters in Cairo, Egypt. Everywhere you go in Madison, there is support from non-unionized, low-paid clerks to the homeless in the street.

The first duty of every revolutionary, every progressive minded person, everyone who wants to put an end to this rotten system of capitalism, with its destruction of people's rights, with its repression, with its virulent racism, sexism, anti-lesbian, gay, bi and trans bigotry is to give complete and unabashed support to this critical labor battle.

Long live the workers of Wisconsin and their fight for justice! □

Class struggle — a Wisconsin tradition

By Stephen Millies, Feb 26, 2011

People around the world, from California to Cairo, are supporting Wisconsin's workers, who've seized their state Capitol building to fight union busting. But this wasn't the first time people seized the Capitol in Madison.

On Sept. 29, 1969, Milwaukee mothers receiving public assistance, led by Father Jim Groppi and supported by 5,000 University of Wisconsin students, took over the Capitol. They held it for 11 hours and chased out the state legislators.

This was a struggle against welfare cuts. Racist politicians wanted to cut out the winter clothing allowance so that poor people would be driven out of the state or freeze to death.

Among the state assembly members chased out was future governor, Tommy Thompson, who took his revenge on poor people by abolishing welfare in the 1990s. Thompson and a majority of the state assembly had Groppi convicted of contempt and sentenced to jail without even allowing a legal defense. The U.S. Supreme Court later threw out Groppi's conviction.

Activists are proud that Wisconsin enacted the first workers compensation law a century ago. The state also passed the first unemployment insurance act in the 1930s.

But as Lloyd Barbee, who led the state's Civil Rights movement, said, "Wisconsin was progressive just for white people." Barbee, who died in 2002, was one of the assembly members who supported the mothers on public assistance in 1969.

Four percent of Black people in prison

One out of every twenty-five African Americans in Wisconsin is incarcerated. That's four percent of all Black people in the state, from the infant in the incubator to the elder trying to blow out a hundred candles on a birthday cake.

Twelve thousand African Americans are in Wisconsin prisons. Back in 1963, the state had fewer than 3,000 prisoners. The great migration of African Americans didn't really reach Wisconsin until the 1950s. Even today just six percent of the state's population is Black. Four percent are Latina/o.

Yet factory after factory in Milwaukee and Racine, Wis., had large numbers of Black workers. Thousands of African Americans were employed in Milwaukee's A.O. Smith plant, which made car frames for General Motors.

Mexican workers filled the meatpacking plants in Milwaukee's Menominee River valley.

Four people were killed in the 1967 rebellion of Milwaukee's Black community. Only the much larger Detroit and Newark uprisings that year had more casualties.

Even before this revolt, Milwaukee was convulsed by daily demonstrations of the NAACP Youth Council, led by Father Groppi, demanding a law against housing discrimination. Every year, Vel Phillips — the first African American and first woman elected to the Milwaukee City Council — would introduce a fair housing law, only to have it voted down 18-1. Lloyd Barbee helped organize the 1965 boycott of the city's segregated school system.

Twenty-five thousand people marched down Wisconsin Avenue in downtown Milwaukee following Dr. King's assassination on April 4, 1968. This march amounted to a Black general strike with close to one-fourth of the African Americans in the city participating in it. This writer remembers the riot police, armed with tear gas launchers, preventing people from crossing the Milwaukee River to the East Side, where the city's financial district is located.

During this period the Milwaukee chapter of the Black Panther Party grew rapidly. High school students were especially attracted to the Panthers. "The 'Milwaukee Three' — Panther members Booker T. Collins Jr., Jesse Lee White and Earl W. Leverette — were framed up.

Because of the relatively small size of Wisconsin's Black community, the ruling class has used the state as a laboratory for reaction. Social services have been cut to the bone. Milwaukee is filled with charter schools.

It was deindustrialization in Milwaukee that allowed capitalists to attack all workers. Plants like A.O. Smith and American Motors were torn down. White and African-American workers were thrown out of union strongholds in Milwaukee, but the Black working class was hurt much more. The result was a big weakening of the labor movement.

Plant shutdowns across Wisconsin have continued with the General Motors plant in Janesville now closed.

Vicious capitalists

Capitalists in Wisconsin are vicious. In 1886 the National Guard killed six Polish-American workers demanding the eight-hour day. In 1898, 2,000 workers in seven woodworking mills in Oshkosh, Wis., went on strike for 14 weeks.

Three union organizers were arrested for "conspiracy." They were found innocent after a two-day summation by their attorney, Clarence Darrow. His speech to the court remains a classic defense of workers' rights.

It took decades to organize Kohler, the big toilet and bathtub maker. This outfit is located in the company town of Kohler, Wis., just outside Sheboygan, Wis.

Two strikers were killed and 40 others were wounded on July 27, 1934. The National Guard was then called in to finish the job of crushing the strike.

The United Auto Workers finally forced Kohler to sign a contract in 1962 after an eight-year-long strike.

Big capitalists like the Bradley and Greede families founded the John Birch Society, whose headquarters are now in Appleton, Wisc.

As late as 1970, Milwaukee's huge Allen-Bradley plant refused to hire Black workers. The Bradley Foundation helped finance publication of the "Bell Curve," a racist manifesto that claims African Americans are inferior.

Destroying a company to fight communism

The Allis-Chambers plant in West Allis — an industrial suburb of Milwaukee — was the largest factory in Wisconsin, with nearly 12,000 production workers.

In 1941, the Allis-Chambers workers — organized in UAW Local 248 — had to go on strike for 76 days before reaching a settlement. Armored cars were used for the first time against strikers in the United States during this class war.

The leader of these workers was Harold Christoffel, a member of the Socialist Party who was sympathetic to the Communist Party. Christoffel became one of the best known left-wing trade unionists in the U.S. and was elected president of the Milwaukee County Industrial Union Council.

Local 248 became a model of militancy. It was famed for its "flying squad" of militants that would help out on local picket lines. Educational programs were launched within the local to raise the workers' class consciousness.

Even though the plant only had a few Black workers, Local 248 held meetings in defense of the Scottsboro defendants, young African-American men framed up on a rape charge in Alabama in the 1930s.

Allis-Chambers — along with the entire capitalist class and government — wanted to crush these workers. This strikebreaking was supported by the treachery of Walter Reuther, who had just been elected UAW president at the union's 1946 convention.

Reuther knew that redbaiting wasn't enough to drive communists out of the labor movement. Even some conservative workers would vote for the left in union elections because "reds" were viewed as fighters. What was necessary was to tag communists with a broken strike.

The Allis-Chambers workers stood firm for 11 months. Local plants would be shut down by their workers for a day, so they could join the picket lines. Among them was Seaman Body — later part of American Motors — where Al Stergar was then employed. Stergar, who died in 1996, helped found Milwaukee's branch of Workers World Party.

These strikers should have won five or six victories. Yet the capitalist class — including its newspapers, its Congress and its Catholic Church — smashed this strike. What was decisive was the backstabbing by Walter Reuther, a renowned UAW leader who was an anti-communist.

Reuther even had Harold Christoffel and the other leaders of Local 248 expelled from the UAW. Later Christoffel would be sent to jail on federal perjury charges for denying to Congress that he was a member of the Communist Party.

Yet Allis-Chambers never recovered the position that it held in the capitalist economy. Its many competitors took advantage of its nearly year-long absence from the capitalist market to grab customers. After a long slow slide, Allis-Chambers finally went out of business in 1985.

But none of these attacks has stopped Wisconsin's the multinational working class from fighting back.

The author was a member of Milwaukee's Workers World Party branch from 1968 to 1978. □



Members of Planned Parenthood at Pride march in Milwaukee June 12. WW photo: Bryan G. Pfeifer

Basketball players' union supports Wisconsin workers

Mar 2, 2011

The following statements were issued Feb. 25 by National Basketball Players Association representatives in opposition to the passing of the anti-union “budget repair bill” by the Wisconsin Assembly on Feb 24.

“Last night’s vote by the Wisconsin Assembly was an attempt to undermine organized labor and the men and women across the country who depend on their unions for a voice in the workplace. The NBPA proudly supports our brothers and sisters in Wisconsin and their stand for unequivocal collective bargaining rights.”

— Billy Hunter, NBPA executive director

“Wisconsin public-sector workers tirelessly deliver services on a daily basis to millions of Wisconsin residents. The right of these hardworking men and women to organize and bargain collectively is fundamental. Wisconsin’s workers deserve better than last night’s vote. Today, our union stands proudly with our fellow union members throughout the state as they continue their fight.”

— Keyon Dooling, NBPA first vice president, Milwaukee Bucks. □

A youth's perspective: 'In Madison we see our future'

Salvatore Cipriano, Mar 2, 2011

Editor's note: The writer is a youth activist and high-school senior from Detroit who took part in a solidarity delegation to Madison, Wis., from Feb. 20-22.

When you first step into the Capitol, it is hard not to be overwhelmed by the feeling of inspiration and solidarity flowing through every corridor and hall. The sight of an ocean of people stirs a hope that is unknown to some and forgotten by many. The main part of the rotunda on the first floor is filled with students who have been organizing the occupation. They have a loudspeaker which everyone gets to use.

The students have played an integral role in this struggle, forming the base for the occupation by organizing sleep-over lists, food donations, medical staff and an information center all within the Capitol itself. Posters are set up, much like a sign in the mall or a building, pointing people toward their desired location.



Inside the occupied capitol, February 15, 2011. WW photo: Bryan G. Pfeifer

The second floor has booths that give out information or free literature, and a reserve of food and beverages is at the end of one of the halls. The charging station, lined with people who are blogging the struggle to every corner of the world, is located on one of the hallways, open to all who need to juice their electronic devices.

At night, the second floor is packed with sleeping bodies of the students and workers who decide to “hold down the fort” and ensure they don’t lose their footing inside the building.

People sleep, find friends or make new friends during this time, allowing a sense of community to blossom within the building. After spending a day or two there, you develop a feeling of kinship with the other people — a respect. Occupying the Capitol has allowed me to understand the feeling of camaraderie that is possible among workers and youth.

The third floor is filled with sleeping bags and groupings of people having conversations. This is a great place to meet new people and exchange ideas, as it is a place to get away from the loud chanting and wonderful music and have talks. It also provides a magical view of the entire rotunda — only here are you allowed to see the entire size of the protest.

The diversity of the ongoing event is also quite incredible. Various groups of unions, students, activists and pro-worker organizations have traveled to Madison to show solidarity with the people of Wisconsin who are fighting the union-busting policies of the new right-wing regime. People from California to New York, Texas to North Dakota all have come to support the occupation.

This is undoubtedly one of the most inspiring aspects of the event. Not only do we have unionized and non-unionized workers from both the public and private sectors, but workers and students from every race, creed and sexuality all standing as one.

“The people united will never be defeated!” This common chant is brought to life before our very eyes. In Madison we see our future and the future of the labor movement in the United States, and it is awe-inspiring. □

Wisconsin: School for labor's fightback

By David Sole, Mar 5, 2011

Editor's note: The writer is a municipal worker, longtime union activist and past president of United Auto Workers Local 2334 in Detroit. He was in Madison, Wis., Feb. 19-21, with a solidarity delegation from Detroit and Chicago.

The struggle now unfolding in Wisconsin will go down in history as the beginning of the long delayed fightback of the U.S. working class. Union and progressive activists have been scanning the horizon for decades, really since the "Reagan revolution," for signs of a labor resurgence against concessions, unemployment and union busting. Not a few have given in to demoralization, convinced that the working class of this country would not be able to rise to its feet. It has taken only a few days for the workers and students of Wisconsin to prove them wrong.

History has repeatedly shown that repression breeds resistance and that many important fights arose from the working class defending itself. In Wisconsin the cocky Gov. Scott Walker, egged on by his Tea Party cronies, went way beyond demands for concessions from public workers to propose ending any real collective bargaining rights for these 175,000 workers.

It may be that Walker overreached himself in his right-wing enthusiasm. It is more likely that the Wall Street corporate bosses and bankers, to whom Wisconsin and other states and municipalities are beholden to the tune of billions upon billions of dollars in loans, gave orders for this new phase of the attack on workers and their organizations. It is certainly no coincidence that bills with almost identical language are being introduced and discussed in other states at the same time.

Now tens of thousands of workers are in motion. They are meeting, discussing, marching, rallying and striking in unprecedented numbers to defend their collective bargaining rights. Special notice must be taken of the students, both in colleges and high schools, who took the advanced position of seizing, occupying and holding the state Capitol building in Madison. Their energy and enthusiasm are impressive. Their commitment to the struggle for union rights and against cuts to education has fired up the student movement across the U.S.

It can be said, with no exaggeration, that the United States has not seen anything like this mobilization since the 1930s or 1940s. Certainly there have been strikes, large and often bitter. There have been mass marches, like Solidarity Day that labor called in 1981 against PATCO union busting. But they are nothing in scope and depth like the developments in Wisconsin.

One can find many things missing in the Wisconsin struggle. The students lack organization and experience. The union leaders also have little experience

to lean on to counter this plan to destroy the unions wholesale. This is inevitable after such a long hiatus in open class warfare. It is only in the struggle that this experience will be gained. New organizations and greater consciousness will emerge as the struggle continues.

'Necessary cutbacks' or general strike?

More attention must be paid to exposing the lie that “cutbacks are necessary.” It needs to be pointed out that there is plenty of money to cover the big deficits in municipal, state and the federal budgets. The profits of the corporations and banks are at a record high — tax them. Interest to the banks is draining the public treasuries — put a freeze on debt service payments. The Pentagon budget and imperialist wars abroad add up to over a trillion dollars a year — slash it. Not a penny has to come from the workers or from critical social service programs.

The Feb. 21 resolution by the Wisconsin South Central Federation of Labor — representing about 45,000 workers in six counties — for a general strike represents a new stage in the struggle. Even during the vicious union-busting attack on the Detroit newspaper strikers in 1995, the Metro-Detroit AFL-CIO central labor council rejected a motion from the floor to have all local unions “vote to authorize a general strike if the council decides it necessary.” The reason given at the time was that “it has never happened in U.S. history.” The fact is that U.S. labor history records many general strikes, like those in Seattle in 1919 and San Francisco in 1934. But union leaders in an era of relative labor peace often shrink from the thought of all-out class warfare.

A general strike would require education and preparation. It would be foolish to think that a mass across-the-board walkout would happen or succeed by just issuing the call. The Wisconsin resolution specified that education begin in all locals on the function of and preparation for a general strike. Serious and careful work in every local union must now begin.

The public, especially the students, must be informed and organized, too. The unions must have a plan — and let the public know — for emergency services. And union leaders and members must be ready for the inevitable attack from the government. Some of the media are already giving dire warnings against a general strike, citing the hated Taft-Hartley Act. It will be incumbent upon national union leaders to gather support and prepare action to show solidarity with the Wisconsin workers in the face of certain government retaliation.

Whatever the outcome of the battle of Wisconsin, the labor movement will never be the same. The growing resentment against all the many attacks on workers, the cutbacks in social services, the racism and oppression permeating society are making a massive fightback necessary and inevitable throughout the United States. Wisconsin workers and students have shown the way. □

No PATCO moment in Wisconsin

By Fred Goldstein, Mar 9, 2011

The great struggle of the Wisconsin public workers has galvanized union solidarity on a national level not seen since 1981. That was when the AFL-CIO organized the Solidarity Day demonstration of half a million workers in Washington, D.C., after President Ronald Reagan had fired 18,000 air traffic controllers, members of the PATCO union, and banned them from federal employment for life.

But Solidarity Day in 1981 was a one-shot, symbolic action that came and went because the issue was quickly abandoned by the top leadership after the demonstration was over. This time it's different.

The determined and sustained stand by the Wisconsin unions, students and community supporters against the union-busting, right-wing Gov. Scott Walker and his corporate backers has aroused workers all over the country. It has raised hope that the unending nightmare of attacks on the working class, and the unions in particular, can be stopped. The direct action of occupying the Capitol building in Madison for two weeks has inspired unionists and their sympathizers from all 50 states — and even from other countries — who have rallied to the cause with donations and other expressions of solidarity.

Wisconsin has shown the potential power, not only of a united labor struggle, but of a budding alliance among unions, the community, and students and youth. Such a prospect can turn the nightmare that labor has been facing into a nightmare for the bosses and bankers.

A majority now favor union rights

Indeed, big business is extremely worried about what effect this eruption of union solidarity will have on the general population and has sent its pollsters to find out. All the polling outfits, including the Wall Street Journal/NBC, the right-wing Rasmussen Reports and several others, got the same results. Sympathy for unions is back on the map in the United States, with 60 percent and more favoring the defense of collective bargaining rights and a similar majority in favor of unions.

The Wisconsin struggle has overcome a decades-long campaign of slander against unions and has successfully countered the effects of all the big business propaganda against so-called “overpaid public workers.”

The defense of collective bargaining as a fundamental right in Wisconsin has strong implications for future campaigns against anti-union, “right-to-work” laws in the South and Southwest.

Despite the great progress that has been made and the great potential that this struggle holds, however, strong measures are going to be needed for victory.

Wisconsin's public employees are facing a hard-right governor who has a hard-right majority in both houses of the Legislature. This is a struggle against the capitalist state, which has capitalist legal authority, judges, financial power and the instruments of force at its disposal to be used against the workers. This is far greater immediate power than any private corporation has at its disposal.

Up against bondholders and bankers

Equally important, the unions are not up against just Gov. Walker, the billionaire Koch brothers, who help to finance the anti-union slander campaign, and the Tea Party.

They are up against the rich bondholders, the bankers who stand behind them and the entire ruling class. These forces are hoping Walker can kill off collective bargaining rights in Wisconsin. Of course, they want it to be done without provoking a great class struggle — they are fearful of such a development. But they are silently behind Walker.

Consider the following item that appeared in the Philadelphia Enquirer online on Feb. 22:

“Of all the Republican proposals for not paying retired teachers and state troopers the pensions promised in more prosperous times, investors prefer Wisconsin-style union-busting over the state-bankruptcy gamble proposed by ex-U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich and ex-Florida Gov. Jeb Bush

“State bankruptcy could let governments break their union contracts and cancel benefits, but it ‘is less desirable to the bondholder, because it creates a higher level of uncertainty that would increase borrowing costs for states and local municipalities,’ says Michael Crow, who manages \$3 billion in clients’ bond investments in state and local governments for Glenmede, the Philadelphia trust bank.

“Barring unions from negotiating benefits, as Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker wants to do, is more likely to improve states’ credit.”

Behind the bondholders stand the banks. Banks have guaranteed \$53 billion in state and municipal bonds that come due in 2011 alone. Another \$24 billion more come due in 2012, and so on.

While the Koch brothers may be cheering Walker on, their view coincides with the view of a large section of finance capital. These are the same financiers who were bailed out to the tune of \$10 trillion, who are making record profits, and who are paying politicians like Walker to declare that there is no money, so the unions and the poor have to be sacrificed.

Walker dreams of a ‘PATCO moment’

Gov. Walker told a blogger, whom he mistakenly thought to be one of the Koch brothers, that this was going to be his “PATCO moment.” This must be taken deadly seriously by the entire labor union movement.



*Madison teachers, students and their families lead march in Madison June 13.
WW Photo: Bryan G. Pfeifer*

Back in 1981, the AFL-CIO leadership was in a state of denial about the seriousness of the firing of the air traffic controllers. But that firing was the opening shot in a 30-year-long anti-labor offensive. The anti-labor offensive unleashed by and supported by the Reagan administration demanded huge concessions on wages, benefits, working conditions and other union rights. The bosses aimed their fire at the industrial unions.

The current offensive has taken aim at teachers and public workers in general.

During the anti-labor offensive of the last 30 years, the top union officialdom left every local union to face the combined forces of big capital on its own. Valiant struggles against concessions were carried out by the copper miners at Phelps Dodge in 1983, the Hormel meat packers in UFCW Local P-9 in 1985, the paper workers at International Paper in 1987, the UAW strike at Caterpillar in 1993, the rubber workers at Bridgestone/Firestone in 1995, the Detroit newspaper strike of 1995-1997 and many more.

All these strikes were carried out against the centralized forces of corporate capital, backed by the banks and the capitalist state. Its judges issued anti-union injunctions upon request, and the police and National Guard escorted in armies of scabs to break the strikes.

Without the mobilization of the labor movement in alliance with the community, the heroism of the rank-and-file workers and local union leaders was insufficient to overcome the demands for concessions.

Combined forces needed to bring victory

It is not just Walker who is looking for a “PATCO moment.” It is the ruling class as a whole.

Under these conditions, the burden of overcoming the Walker regime and his ruling-class backers should not be left on the shoulders of the Wisconsin workers alone. Nor should the public workers of Ohio — who have just suffered a setback — or the public workers of Indiana, Michigan and all the other states coming under attack be left to fight isolated battles.

This offensive against public workers is clearly orchestrated by the central powers of the capitalist class. They are in control of the media, the state, and all the levers of power and influence needed to carry out this vicious campaign.

The national leadership of the AFL-CIO, of Change to Win and all independent unions must unite to support this struggle, and not just symbolically.

Nor should the labor movement rely solo on the 14 Wisconsin Democratic state senators. These senators, under the pressure of the struggle, took a bold move — bold for politicians — and left the state to deny the Republicans a quorum. It was a progressive act for which they have been vilified by the right wing, fined, threatened with arrest, had privileges removed, etc.

Their act gave the workers valuable time to mobilize mass support and strengthen the struggle at the Capitol. But they are legislators, and they can only legislate what the workers are able to win on the ground. The fate of this struggle cannot rely on whether or not the Republicans can get a quorum. It is up to the working class to carry out the actual struggle to force Walker and the ruling class to back off.

The union leadership correctly made collective bargaining their fundamental priority. But they gave in to the psychological and political pressure of big business. Instead of saying “Tax the rich” and showing that public employees are underpaid compared to the private sector, they unnecessarily made concessions on health care and pensions without any struggle. But these concessions could also be reversed in the course of the struggle.

Idea of a general strike

The question of a general strike has been raised by the Wisconsin South Central Labor Federation. Just raising it, if only as a threat, is an advance for the union movement. Even a short general strike of a limited duration, from one to a few days, is a major undertaking and could energize the whole working class. A full-fledged general strike is a most serious matter in the struggle between the classes. It would require great logistical, strategic and tactical preparation. It involves organizing transportation, the supply of food, emergency medical services, services to the poor, education and other questions of social and economic organization. It means building up support in the community in advance through mass propaganda and organization. It would require educating



Thousands of students and workers rally at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee February 17. WW Photo: Bryan G. Pfeifer

the workers. Above all it would require the greatest unity among the unions and with the general population. If a general strike were to be carried out, the workers would have to be prepared to confront the fury of the ruling class. To successfully carry out a general strike in Wisconsin would certainly require the support of the entire labor movement, along with the support of the community.

The AFL-CIO has called for a mobilization in Madison on March 12. This is a step in the right direction. It raises another option of a Solidarity-style massive demonstration, with hundreds of thousands occupying the state capital until the legislation is dropped. Such a mobilization could set the stage for a general strike. It could also reverse the layoffs announced by Walker.

Such a demonstration would send a message not only to Walker in Wisconsin but also to Gov. John Kasich in Ohio, Gov. Mitch Daniels in Indiana, Gov. Rick Snyder in Michigan and to the entire ruling class that they will face a fierce class struggle if they try to impose these onerous concessions on the workers.

Any such mass mobilization would have to raise the question of jobs in a major way. This would send a signal to the millions of unemployed, especially those in the Black, Latino/a and Native communities, which suffer from extremely high unemployment, that the unions are on their side. This is crucial to building not just union solidarity but class solidarity within the working class as a whole.

These are the types of measures necessary to deny Walker, the Koch brothers, the bankers and the bosses their “PATCO moment” and to revive the class struggle on a scale needed to push the economic crisis back onto the backs of the millionaires and billionaires, where it belongs. □

Anti-war forces in Madison demand ‘Jobs, not wars!’

By Bryan G. Pfeifer, Mar 12, 2011

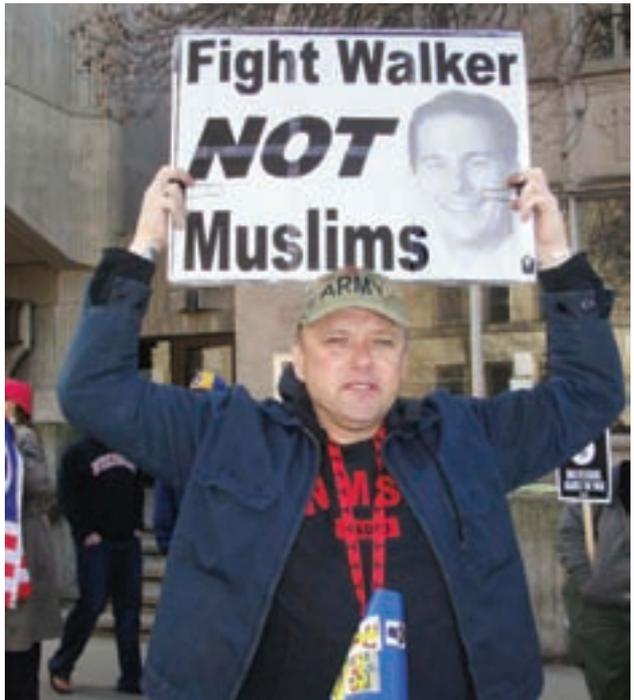
From the beginning of the people’s struggle against Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker’s “budget repair bill,” at the behest of the banks, corporations and the Pentagon, thousands of peace and anti-war forces have traveled to Madison and other parts of the state to confront the politicians’ and their rich backers’ lie that there’s no money for people’s needs.

The United National Anti-War Committee sent a solidarity delegation to Madison for the tens-of-thousands-strong Feb. 26 protest at the state Capitol. UNAC members from Minnesota, Illinois, Vermont and Virginia carried a 25-foot banner that read, “Stop the war on unions, Muslims, immigrants and communities of color!” They passed out thousands of fliers linking defense of unions with opposing wars abroad.

The UNAC statement concludes by demanding, “Money For Jobs, Not War!” and calling on poor and working people to support, build for and attend the anti-war rally and marches in New York City on April 9 and April 10 in San Francisco.

Go to UNACPeace.org to read their entire statement of solidarity with Wisconsin workers.

According to Costofwar, since 2001 taxpayers in Wisconsin — the overwhelming majority of whom are poor and working people — have been robbed of more than \$18 billion to fund just the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As in the countries where the U.S. is waging war, domestically the effects of the U.S. wars affect children, women and people of color the worst. (costofwar.com)



Anti-war and labor march participant in Madison in March.
WW Photo: Bryan G. Pfeifer

U.S. Labor Against the War states, “Solidarity with Public Workers in Wisconsin Is a Stand for Public Workers and Labor Rights Everywhere.” (uslaboragainstar.org).

Iraq Veterans Against the War issued a statement to members of the Wisconsin National Guard during the weekend of Feb. 18 that reads in part: “In the midst of the growing protests in Madison, and across the Midwest, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker recently stated that he was preparing the National Guard to respond to any problems following the introduction of union-busting legislation in Wisconsin. We know that National Guard troops have been used in the past against striking workers, protesting students, and to quell urban rebellions in the U.S., at times with horrifying results (think Jackson and Kent State, 1970). But recent events in Egypt remind us that service members have the power to side with the people.” (www.ivaw.org)

Other organizations also sending solidarity delegations to Madison are Veterans For Peace, the Wisconsin Network For Peace and Justice, Peace Action Wisconsin, Courage to Resist, the Answer Coalition, the International Action Center, the Michigan Emergency Committee Against War & Injustice, Stop FBI Repression and Women Against Military Madness.

The writer is an organizer with MECAWI, a member of UNAC. □

Milwaukee march hits racism, union busting

In a historic merging of the union movement and the Civil Rights Movement, the Rev. Jesse Jackson Jr. and Baxter Leach and Elmore Nickleberry, two leaders of the 1968 Memphis strike during which Dr. King was assassinated, led “A March Fit for a King” down Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd. in Milwaukee April 2. The marchers protested the attempted union-busting in Wisconsin and also the apartheid-like conditions for the African American community in Milwaukee.

Photo: MICAH



Don't forget Milwaukee

By Monica Moorehead, Mar 27, 2011

Gov. Scott Walker, who spearheaded the recent bill dismantling collective bargaining rights for public sector workers, is not the first Wisconsin governor to push through anti-poor, anti-worker legislation. In 1997, just one year after the Clinton administration dismantled the federally funded Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, then-Gov. Tommy Thompson instituted state anti-welfare legislation called “Wisconsin Works” or “W2.”

Wisconsin Works had nothing to do with providing single mothers with decent-paying jobs and childcare. Instead, it had everything to do with driving thousands of single mothers into deeper poverty with either low-wage jobs or a pittance of cash assistance. It had a devastating impact across the state, but especially in Milwaukee, where 68 percent of Wisconsin’s African-American population lives. This cruel, reactionary legislation was funded by the right-wing Heritage and Bradley foundations.

Fourteen years later, the effects from W2 are still being felt in the 26th most populous city in the U.S. In 2010, 40 percent of all evictions in Milwaukee were of African-American women, especially single mothers. Milwaukee has an overall unemployment rate of close to 27 percent — almost triple the official national rate. This figure is second in the U.S. only to Detroit. Milwaukee is suffering from a 53 percent unemployment rate among African-American men. Other genocidal conditions in Milwaukee include growing poverty, homelessness, incarcerations, public school closings and police brutality.

Black workers, especially women, have depended heavily on public sector jobs to help them get out of poverty, own a home, send their children to college, and retire with a livable pension like all workers should. Losing their jobs to anti-union bills and devastating budget cuts is creating a deeper crisis within the Black community in disproportionate numbers.

The ongoing struggle in Wisconsin is an important lesson that shows the need for building grassroots labor/student and community alliances. Class solidarity with the oppressed city of Milwaukee has to be the number-one priority in the mass fight against union busting, budget cuts and racism — all divide-and-conquer tools of the capitalist bosses and their bought-and-paid-for politicians like Walker. □

Los Angeles solidarity with Wisconsin workers

By Cheryl LaBash, Mar 30, 2011

“We Stand with Wisconsin Workers” was the message from 15,000 workers and community allies at the March 26 “Our Communities, Our Good Jobs” march through downtown Los Angeles and rally at Pershing Square. Wisconsin Professional Firefighters Association President Mahlon Mitchell was on the lead banner and spoke to the rally. He called on workers to “stay in the streets” to win. A mini-rally at a Ralphs grocery store on the march route put the full support of regional unions on the side of the Food and Commercial Workers in their current contract negotiations. Bosses forced a 20-week strike in 2003-2004. □



WW photo: Cheryl LaBash

A brief history of Wisconsin

By Joe Johnson, Chippewa Falls, Wis., Apr 17, 2011

Less than a year ago the Tea Party was able to attract considerable publicity around a rally it held in Wausau, Wis.

High unemployment and foreclosures, plant closings, the virtual disappearance of family and middle-sized farms, and their displacement by larger factory farms had the people of this state angry and confused. But extreme right-wing movements are a sign of the weakness of the capitalist class, not its strength.

In just a few weeks of working-class action and struggle, a major shift in union and class consciousness has taken place here in Wisconsin.

It is instructive to briefly go over the history of this state. The land was stolen from the Native people, mostly the Ojibway, who had lived here for more than 10,000 years. That is where the name Chippewa comes from. Immigrants from Ireland and France began settling along the upper Chippewa River in the late 17th century.

The first natural resource exploited here was the pine — big, straight trees that produced the greatest lumber in the world. English lumber barons got rich off the labor of French and Irish lumberjacks like my grandfather.

Chippewa Falls for a while had the largest sawmill under one roof in the world. The logs and lumber were floated down the Chippewa River by river people, mostly French and Native men. V. R. Dunne, a Minneapolis union leader in the tempestuous struggles of the 1930s and a good friend of this writer in his old age, had been one such river person.

The exploiters cut the beautiful, straight timber, made their money and left relatively quickly. They left behind, however, another resource — the very rich soil. This was not flat prairies, like much of the Midwest, but small hills and valleys of rich grassland, perfect for cows and small family farms.

Soon there were more cows than people, and Wisconsin was the largest producer of milk and cheese in the country, exporting to other states and the world. Only in the area around Lake Michigan did much industry grow up.

Capitalist parties: no solution for the workers

Politically, the people of Wisconsin were very opposed to slavery and a plantation-type economy. The Republican Party was actually founded in Wisconsin in 1854. It was a new national party opposed to the spread of slavery into the Western territories. It soon had three divisions: a center, a far left and a far right — all with their own newspapers and followers.

The far right of the Wisconsin Republican Party eventually produced reactionaries like Sen. Joseph McCarthy and the John Birch Society. Out of the far left came the Populists and Progressives. This often led to great political swings in the state.

In that period, the Democratic Party hardly existed in Wisconsin, except during national presidential campaigns. The Republicans, however, had a strong social base among the farmers.

By the 1940s, Wisconsin's economy was changing. The thousands of small dairies were being bought up by Kraft Foods. Soon small family farms were becoming large family farms. Later these were either absorbed by or became larger industrial farms that hired tens and even hundreds of laborers at low wages.

Industries began to develop in the Milwaukee area and the unions got a foothold there. Union members were able to get signatures to put Democratic Party candidates on the ballot. Auto and eventually computer factories came to the state, made a lot of money and have mostly gone elsewhere today. The Democratic Party, which grew in this period, has now grown weak.

Today hardly any family farms remain. Only a few specialty cheese producers and dairies that handle perhaps half a percent of Wisconsin's cheese and milk production remain independent. Kraft Foods, however, has become a transnational corporation with \$50 billion in net annual revenue and more than half its business outside of North America.

The Republican Party, which had been based on the farmers, is now a party of big capital. The Democratic Party has some people based in the unions. However, the industrial unions have been greatly weakened.

The election in 2010 of Gov. Scott Walker, a Republican who has launched a direct attack on the very existence of unions, was the result of people's frustration with the failure of the Democrats to stem the growing capitalist economic crisis.

A union firefighter recently told me that he had voted for Walker because he thought at the time that Walker would bring jobs, while the Democratic candidate would not. But now he was out on the streets, protesting Walker's attack on the unions' right to bargain and organize.

Some think the uprising of the Wisconsin public workers has energized the Democratic Party. But U.S. Sen. Herb Kohl, a Democrat, never went to Madison and has said nothing about this struggle. President Barack Obama likewise has not spoken to the protesters or the teachers, only to a group of mainly Republican governors, telling them he understands their budget problems.

What strength the unions have at present comes from the public sector, like the teachers. If Gov. Walker is able to destroy the government unions, he will basically have destroyed the Wisconsin union movement.

But this is the past. Today the people of Wisconsin — union members, students and people from the community — are in the streets and have actually succeeded in occupying the Capitol for more than three weeks. They have gone around the capitalist political parties in their struggle, imparting a new consciousness that will make a new history. □

Wisconsin continues to be cauldron of struggle

By Bryan G. Pfeifer, Milwaukee, Wis., Apr 28, 2011

Protest activities continue across Wisconsin to fight the union-busting bill signed by Gov. Scott Walker on March 11. They are also directed at the many anti-people measures contained in the budget proposal for the next two fiscal years, 2011-2013, which would cut at least \$3.6 billion from services that help poor and working people.

Because of the massive people's resistance, an injunction is still in place that prevents the bill signed by Walker on March 11 from being implemented and becoming law. The bill is also before the Wisconsin Supreme Court.

The people's struggle against union busting and other anti-people attacks is also giving mobilizing strength to the now annual May Day march and rally in Milwaukee, sponsored by the immigrant rights organization Voces de la Frontera. Thus far the Wisconsin AFL-CIO; American Federation of Teachers Local 212; the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) in Wisconsin; the Painters and Allied Trades Local 781; Service Employees Local 1; and other unions are supporting and mobilizing for this event.

The demands for the mobilization include full legalization for immigrants, no to union busting, keep in-state tuition for immigrant students, oppose budget cuts and oppose any and all racist copycat Arizona-type legislation that targets immigrants in Wisconsin. (www.vdlf.org)

The final tally in the April 5 election for the Wisconsin Supreme Court — which was widely considered a referendum on Walker's anti-union measures — was released on April 15. It showed the conservative David Prosser winning by 7,316 votes over independent JoAnne Kloppenberg. But on April 20 Joanne Kloppenberg decided to request a statewide recount. Until a full recount is done, the Government Accountability Board can't certify the results.

The election is marred by controversy due to a conservative clerk in Waukesha County "finding," on the day after the election, thousands of ballots for Prosser, which made him the winner. The clerk, Kathy Nickolaus, is a former Prosser employee and has previously been investigated for voter fraud.

"An honest and open recount is the only way that the voters of Wisconsin can have confidence in the results of the 2011 Supreme Court election," said Phil Neuenfeldt, president of the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO on April 20. "A manual recount will only add to the integrity of the electoral process and provide reassurance to the unprecedented amount of voters who came out on April 5 to make their voices heard." (wisafclcio.typepad.com)

Across the state, poor and working people from Madison, Milwaukee and beyond continue to engage in a wide range of protest activities, including recall campaigns, targeting banks and corporations through various means, protesting anti-people politicians wherever they turn up, protesting on “Tax Day” by demanding that the rich pay taxes, packing budget hearing meetings and more. International solidarity in many forms — such as the action of members of the International Longshore Workers Union Local 10 shutting down the docks in San Francisco and Oakland April 4 — is ongoing as well.

U. of Wisconsin-Milwaukee occupation continues

Aaron Luther is a member of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and a participant in an occupation at this university which began its eighth week on April 25. The occupation began at the Theatre Department, which is facing virtual elimination under Walker’s 2011-2013 budget proposal. Students are now occupying space in the Student Union.

“We are here to get the message out to the students and the faculty that what Scott Walker wants to do to the university as far as privatization will raise our tuition and we can’t afford that,” says Luther. “We are also here to get information out about what Walker wants to do to the city of Milwaukee and the state of Wisconsin in general. We demand that UW-Milwaukee maintain a public status as a university, and that tuition and fees be frozen so that tuition no longer goes up. We’re going to use this space as long as we feel it’s necessary. We’re constantly rethinking, re-planning and reorganizing.”

Added Luther: “Getting support from the unions has been really big for us. We’ve gotten quite a bit of incredibly positive responses. The unions take care of all the maintenance and all the cleaning. If it wasn’t for them, the university wouldn’t run. We wouldn’t be able to keep it looking as good as it does. And the Teaching Assistants union [members] are giving us their support and we’ve gotten support from other groups on campus such as SDS and Act Everywhere.

“During the school day we leaflet and talk to people. When we have free time, we’ve gone out to protests. Several of us have gone to Madison. We protested at Walmart the last two Sundays because Walmart gave money to Scott Walker’s campaign, and Walmart has a bad workers’ rights record. We are also setting up more protests for other companies that happen to be on the boycott list or are grossly anti-union,” concluded Luther.

Statements of solidarity can be sent to uwmoccupied@yahoo.com. Supporters are welcome to visit anytime. Donations of food and supplies, which are always needed, can be dropped off at the occupied space in the student union, or people can email to work out arrangements.

'We'll be victorious!'

Gilbert Johnson, president of AFSCME Local 82 at UW-Milwaukee and also a member of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU) and the A. Philip Randolph Institute, has been and is a principal organizer of the people's resistance in Wisconsin. He is mobilizing for a May 21 town hall meeting in Milwaukee. Johnson will be a featured speaker at this year's May Day rally in New York City.

On May 21, the ninth annual African-American Labor and Community Summit will take place at the Laborers' Local 113 union hall, 6310 Appleton Ave. in Milwaukee. This year's town hall meeting is sponsored by the CBTU and the A. Philip Randolph Institute. Its theme is "Get up, stand up for your rights." This event is free and open to the public and runs from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. For more information, call 414-771-9828 or 414-412-5219 or email jayafclcio@sbcglobal.net or rightreign@gmail.com.

Says Johnson: "We're settling in for many battles and we're confident that we'll be victorious. Truly an injustice done to one is an injustice to all. This is a world people's struggle. The Wisconsin struggle is no strange occurrence as we watch people in Egypt, Iraq and all over the world striving for freedom. Thanks to all the people who have a worldview who are able to bring that view home to us that we not be so disillusioned and lost. We do have leadership that can hook us into the worldview and also give us a strategy that will take us on to victory against capitalist greed, war and those who would destroy our way of life."

To help and for more information, visit wisafclcio.org; wisafclcio.typepad.com; www.vdlf.org; www.defendwisconsin.org; and www.bailoutpeople.org. □



*Local 10 members applaud as Dave Welsh reads letters of solidarity
(See article on page 40). Photo: Randall White*

Labor defends longshore union from employer attacks

By Dave Welsh, San Francisco, Apr 28, 2011

Several hundred defenders and members of International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 10 in Oakland took over the plaza at Pacific Maritime Association headquarters here on April 25 to demand that the employers' group drop its lawsuit against the union. The suit was in retaliation for the dockworkers' solidarity action on April 4 in defense of Wisconsin public workers.

The militant lunchtime rally praised the voluntary rank-and-file action by Local 10 members on April 4. The action resulted in no ships being loaded or unloaded for 24 hours in the San Francisco and Oakland ports.

"This was Wisconsin on the docks," said ILWU member Clarence Thomas. He pointed out that the rank and file were answering the AFL-CIO's call for "No Business as Usual" during the April 4 nationwide day of action to defend besieged public workers in Wisconsin and 15 other states — who are threatened with losing their pensions, union work rules, collective bargaining rights and social services.

"This was a courageous act of conscience on the part of these dock workers — whose work, by the way, is critical to the functioning of the global economy. Remember that Oakland is the fourth-busiest container port in the country," said Thomas.

The mass protest at PMA was seen as a "shot across the bow" launching a national defense campaign, supported by the San Francisco Labor Council, to defend and assert the right of ILWU members and all workers to take job actions or withhold their labor in solidarity with the struggles of other workers.

Jack Heyman, another Local 10 dock worker, said the 1934 West Coast Maritime Strike led by Harry Bridges and the San Francisco General Strike that followed it "are what made San Francisco a union town. Now we're in another crisis of capitalism. This time the government workers are in the forefront of the struggle.

"It's a class struggle, and we're facing bipartisan attacks," continued Heyman. "The difference between the two parties is that the Republicans want to take away collective bargaining and the Democrats want to keep collective bargaining as long as we accept unacceptable concessions. In addition to Wisconsin's Republican Gov. Walker, we've got Democrat Gov. Jerry Brown in California. They both want to sock it to us."

Trent Willis, Local 10 dockworker and former president, said the April 4 actions took place on the anniversary of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. He told how Dr. King was made an honorary member of Local 10 and addressed the membership in September 1967 while in San Francisco organizing for a Poor People's March on Washington to demand economic and social rights for unemployed workers and the poor.

"We need to recreate what Brother Martin was trying to do in those years," said Willis. "Today the employer class is coming after everybody. That means we need another Million Worker March, another Poor People's campaign. We need a general strike."

Monadel Herzallah of the Arab American Union Members Council recalled the powerful moment last June 20 when 800 to 1,000 people massed at a terminal in the port of Oakland at 5:30 in the morning to prevent the loading or unloading of an Israeli Zim Lines ship. This was to protest the murderous Israeli attack on a Turkish ship bringing aid to besieged Palestinians in Gaza. ILWU Local 10 honored the picket line and the terminal was idle for 24 hours.

"You can't begin to imagine the impact that action had," said Herzallah. "There are homes in Gaza where pictures of that 5:30 a.m. picket line in Oakland are taped to the wall. I have no doubt that the people's uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt and the union movements that played such an important role there were inspired by the ILWU refusal to cross the line and work the Israeli ship.

"But solidarity is not a one-way street," Herzallah concluded. "Now Local 10 is under attack for taking a selfless action in solidarity with Wisconsin workers, and they need the active support of every union, every community group, every one of us."

Cephus Johnson, uncle of Oscar Grant, who was shot dead by transit police on New Year's Day in 2009, referred to the fact that Dr. King was in Memphis to support the campaign to win a union contract for sanitation workers. "For change to occur, labor and community, we all must unite," he said. "On the streets not far from here there are homeless people; there is police brutality. ILWU Local 10 fights for justice and equality for all. This is the only way we will win."

Two ILWU ship's clerks from Seattle, Michael Hoard and Gabriel Prawl, flew to San Francisco to be part of the rally. "I came down here to fight," said Hoard, "and to stand with my brothers and sisters in Local 10 because they're not afraid to go to bat for people who are suffering."

Prawl said he was "inspired by Local 10. There is an attack coming down on working people, an attack by big business and the bosses on Wall Street. Local 10 is the one union that stands with organized labor and also with the unemployed." Longshore locals in Seattle and Portland, Ore., have voted to support Local 10 in this fight.

Solidarity from Wisconsin, Greece, Brazil, the Carolinas

Solidarity messages have rolled in from around the world. From Madison, Wis., the South Central Federation of Labor extended “our heartfelt thank you for the solidarity your members showed on April 4. Whether it’s racist apartheid in South Africa, imperialist war in Iraq, or fascist plutocracy in Wisconsin, Local 10, over and over again, shows us ‘what a Union should look like’!!”

The World Federation of Trade Unions, based in Athens, Greece, with 80 million affiliated members, wrote to “salute the militant solidarity demonstrated by the sisters and brothers of Local 10 ILWU. Your refusal to work on April 4th is a real example of class-oriented trade unionism in action. The right to strike is fundamental to all workers. Especially now, as the crisis of the capitalist system deepens and workers find themselves under increasingly sharp attacks, this basic right needs to be protected and extended.”

Brazil’s CGTB labor federation wrote to “condemn the attitude of the PMA and the U.S. government to crack down on workers’ rights to unionize, to demonstrate, to fight for their rights.”

A resolution from United Electrical Workers, Eastern Region said of the 24-hour Oakland port shutdown: “Such bold, militant rank-and-file worker job actions are similar to that taken by UE Local 1110 members in Chicago to occupy and save the Republic Windows and Doors factory in 2008.”

The UE pointed out that anti-labor laws like the Taft-Hartley Act can be resisted, as the ILWU did successfully after the coastwide shutdown of West Coast ports on May Day 2008 to denounce the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Meanwhile, employers and state governments have also used Taft-Hartley to deny collective bargaining to public workers in the South, “yet public workers in North Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia boldly organize under the UE banner.”

Ken Riley, president of the Charleston, S.C., Longshore local, wrote ILWU Local 10 that their solidarity action on April 4 “was exactly the medicine that was needed to treat and destroy this aggressive and malignant cancer that was unleashed on the body of Labor. ... Your valiant stand on the Wisconsin issue has once again set the bar for Labor’s response. Unfortunately, the rest of Labor just hasn’t got it yet. Labor should have issued a national strike to address the Wisconsin issue.”

In mid-April, many labor, community and social justice activists, including ILWU rank-and-filers and the SF Labor Council, came together to form the Committee to Defend ILWU Local 10, which can be reached at defendlocal10@sonic.net. You can sign up online to send a letter to the CEO of PMA or download a petition at www.bailoutpeople.org/ilwu. Send donations, with “Defend ILWU” on the memo line, to the committee c/o SF Labor Council, 1188 Franklin, San Francisco, CA 94109. □

100,000 demand rights for immigrants & unions

By Bryan G. Pfeifer, Milwaukee, Wis., May 5, 2011

In one of the biggest marches and rallies in Wisconsin history, more than 100,000 people participated in this year’s May Day in Milwaukee.

The action was sponsored by the immigrant rights organization Voces de la Frontera and endorsed by the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO and numerous other labor, community and youth organizations. Participants’ demands included legalization now; no Arizona racist copycat legislation in Wisconsin; keep in-state tuition for immigrant students; and no union busting in Wisconsin or anywhere in the United States.

The march began on the south side of Milwaukee at Voces de la Frontera’s offices. It included whole families along with labor, community and youth delegations that carried colorful banners such as “People before banks, Stop union busting: Jobs, not racism, Legalization, not anti-immigrant laws” and chanted slogans such as “¡Sí se puede!”

Labor delegations included the Service Employees union, the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. Members of many unions attended, including the



May Day 2011, Milwaukee.
WW photo: Bryan G. Pfeifer

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and the United Auto Workers, including a member of UAW Local 833 at the Kohler Company.

At the main rally, historic solidarity was displayed among immigrant rights groups, organized labor, and youth and students. Among the speakers were Christine Neuman-Ortiz, executive director of Voces de la Frontera; Richard Trumka, president of the AFL-CIO; Mahlon Mitchell, president of the Wisconsin Firefighters Association; Michael Rosen of the American Federation of Teachers Local 212; Phil Neuenfeldt of the Wisconsin AFL-CIO; and numerous youth activists from Voces de la Frontera youth organization. Other student organizations such as UWM Occupied (the group occupying a portion of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Student Union) and Students for a Democratic Society in Wisconsin participated.

Speakers denounced the racist attacks against immigrants of color and the attempted union busting in Wisconsin and around the U.S. and pointed to the banks, corporations and Pentagon as the real enemies of poor and working people.

Trumka came to Milwaukee's May Day to show unity with the immigrant workers' struggle and with the struggle against union busting in Wisconsin. "Now your Gov. Scott Walker ... has declared war on Wisconsin workers and, like you did before, you joined in a peaceful protest to say 'No! No!'" said Trumka. "This day — May Day — is our day, our day to stand together shoulder to shoulder for immigrant and worker rights. Thank you for being here and showing Wisconsin and the world that we are one."

Participants came from all over Wisconsin on buses and car caravans. Workers also came from other states to show their solidarity. Delegations from the Michigan Emergency Committee Against War and Injustice, the Moratorium NOW! Coalition and Workers World Party came from Detroit.

After the May Day march and rally, a group of activists participated in the annual ceremony in the Bay View area of Milwaukee marking the 125th anniversary of the May 5, 1886, tragedy in which the state militia shot into some 1,500 workers marching for an eight-hour day, killing seven in front of the Milwaukee Iron Co. rolling mill, then Milwaukee's largest manufacturing plant.

There was also a May 1 march and rally at the state Capitol in Madison.

For more information, updates and upcoming activities: www.vdlf.org; www.wisafclcio.org; wisafclcio.typepad.com; www.defendwisconsin.org; www.bailoutpeople.org. □

Broad support at Milwaukee LGBT Pride march

By Ben Carroll, Jun 22, 2011

At Milwaukee's LGBT Pride march June 12, Bail Out the People Movement activists marched with the spirited "From Stonewall to WI: Queer Workers United" contingent. The contingent included Milwaukee public school teachers, university workers, and other public workers, students and community members.



WW photo: Bryan G. Pfeifer

Onlookers and passersby enthusiastically greeted the contingent and joined in chants of "2, 4, 6, 8, support our workers gay or straight!" Other progressives included Planned Parenthood Wisconsin, progressive faith groups, numerous lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer organizations and others.

The contingents were part of the burgeoning people's uprising in Wisconsin that is fighting union-busting and other anti-people attacks.

For more information on how to assist the people's struggle in Wisconsin, go to www.wisaficio.org, www.vdlf.org, or www.wibailoutpeople.org. □

Walkerville

On June 4 more than 100 tents went up around the state Capitol in Madison. It was as a staging ground for actions and rallies to intervene as the draconian, racist, sexist budget made its way through the legislature.

WW photo: Bryan G. Pfeifer



Bail Out the People Movement links struggles

By Bryan G. Pfeifer, Milwaukee, Wis., Jun 23, 2011

Since the Wisconsin union-busting bill was first introduced in February, the Bail Out the People Movement is one of many progressive organizations that have brought in organizers from across the country — often at their own expense — to help build the mighty peoples’ resistance here.

BOPM now has a chapter in Wisconsin and has been in the streets to advance the struggle. Organizers have raised the role of the banks in creating the misery that all poor and working people — especially people of color, women and children — are experiencing as the capitalist crisis drags on.

On June 7, BOPM organized a street speak-out on the north side of Milwaukee, a predominately African American area. With a banner that read “Jobs Not Racism!,” members of the community spoke out against unemployment, the foreclosure crisis, and the attacks on education and public services — all being driven by the banks and corporations.

The role of the police in terrorizing Black and Latino/a neighborhoods, all the money that is spent to build prisons and wage wars on people across the globe, and how that money could instead be used to fund a jobs program and peoples’ needs here at home, were also raised at the speak-out.

On June 8, BOPM, UWM Occupied, the Moratorium Now! Coalition, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, Voces de la Frontera, the National Black United Front and others participated in a demonstration outside the main headquarters of Chase bank in Milwaukee.

The protest demanded a moratorium on foreclosures, justice for farm workers in North Carolina, and for banks like Chase to pay for the crisis that their system created and the misery being inflicted on people. Chase bank, a division of JPMorgan Chase, carries out the most home foreclosures of any U.S. bank.

Chase is also the chief financier of R.J. Reynolds tobacco company. Workers from FLOC have been waging a three-year-long struggle to win better working conditions, wages and justice in the fields of North Carolina and elsewhere.

Even before demonstrators arrived, the area in front of Chase had been roped off with a sign declaring the area “private property” and closed to public access for 24 hours. Nearly two dozen cops from Milwaukee and private Chase goons flanked the main entrance to the building. Organizers with the Moratorium Now! Coalition traveled from Detroit to join the lively demonstration, which included speakers from a wide range of progressive organizations.

At the Milwaukee Pride march on June 12, BOPM marched with the spirited Queer Workers for Wisconsin contingent. For more information on how to join WI BOPM, go to www.wibailoutpeople.org or email wibailoutpeople@gmail.com.

Lessons of Wisconsin: Only the class struggle works

By Fred Goldstein, Jun 23, 2011

The cutting-edge struggle in Wisconsin against the capitalist anti-labor, pro-austerity offensive suffered a severe legal setback on June 14. The state Supreme Court overturned a permanent injunction against the union-busting bill signed into law March 11 by the reactionary, racist governor, Scott Walker.

The Dane County court, after mass pressure, had issued an injunction against the bill on May 26. But Walker, architect of the so-called “budget repair” bill, had the capitalist class behind him and prevailed in the higher court.

The problem is not just the legal ruling. The basic question to be asked by rank-and-file unionists, leaders in the oppressed communities and militant students and youth, all of whom pushed this great struggle forward, is the following:

How could the organized labor movement and its allies allow a decision by a tiny group of judges in a capitalist court to override the actions and demands of hundreds of thousands of Wisconsin workers — organized and unorganized, employed and unemployed, immigrants, farmers, youth and students, community organizations — who have been in a high state of mobilization since the Feb. 14 occupation of the Capitol?

This draconian law wipes out collective bargaining by public workers. It establishes the same provisions that prevail in the so-called “right to work” states in the U.S. South. Under associated budget provisions, \$800 million or more will be taken from services for the people — including education, health care, food and housing assistance. Hundreds of millions of dollars will be given to the rich in tax breaks and contracts.

The mobilization of Wisconsin workers for four months was one of the greatest sustained shows of strength and organization by the unions in decades. It inspired solidarity, national and international, and a rise in public support for unions.

The 18 days of occupying the Capitol and mass rallies peaked on March 12, when an estimated 185,000 surrounded the Capitol in Madison.

How can such an unpopular set of laws be imposed on millions in the face of this?

It's not over

It is not too late to ask these questions. One chapter in the Wisconsin struggle may be over, but the attacks are not. The opportunity to reopen the battle may soon reappear.

The short answer is that the struggle had to move from purely political pressure of mass demonstrations to the direct class struggle, where the government, the bosses and the bankers would either be stopped cold or made to pay a high price.

Great excitement and hope was raised when the Wisconsin South Central Federation of Labor, representing 45,000 workers, voted to support any measures taken by its member unions to prepare for a general strike if the law passed. This vote came after a demonstration of 100,000 at the Capitol two days earlier.

The buzz about a general strike in Wisconsin affected the labor movement around the country. Often radical groups demand the labor movement call a general strike without regard to the conditions. But, for the first time in many years, the actual conditions seemed to be taking shape and a major labor federation actually brought it up.

The next week, on Feb. 26, the demonstrations in Madison increased in size and scope to 150,000. Solidarity demonstrations were held in all 50 states. Delegations came to Madison from far and wide, including a planeload of unionists from Los Angeles.

Using an illegal parliamentary maneuver, the Republicans passed the union-busting law and on March 11 Gov. Walker signed it into law. The next day the largest demonstration yet took place, estimated by the AFL-CIO at 185,000, including a large delegation of Wisconsin farmers on their tractors.

By this time it was crystal clear that no amount of political pressure was going to move Walker, the Republicans or the ruling class behind them.

The demonstrations had reached maximum strength. The law was passed. The ranks and lower-level union officials waited to see, now that the bill had passed, what would be the next step.

One option was to reoccupy the Capitol with massive numbers. The occupation had been ended earlier by a combination of lying and trickery by state and labor officials, who helped coax the student and worker occupiers out of the building.

Would there be encouragement or motion for a general strike? The bill had not been stopped. Now it had to be overturned. The struggle needed to be escalated.

The Wisconsin South Central Federation of Labor website published a detailed explanation of how the labor movement in Ontario, Canada, had from 1995 to 1998 carried out 11 Days of Action. These general strikes had defeated union busting and a harsh austerity program. (sefl.org)

Leaders of the Ontario struggle described in detail such things as how to overcome divisions among the unions and how to build alliances with community organizations and social movements. It showed how to set up strike committees with co-chairs from the unions and the community. This is most important in Wisconsin because, while the center of struggle was in Madison, the Black, Latino/a community and immigrant communities, documented and undocumented, would be central to the success of any statewide struggle against the government.

Educating white workers on solidarity with the oppressed communities would be key. The Ontario labor leadership showed how to carry out a protracted

campaign to educate union members in meeting halls, homes, bars and donut shops. It went over how to bridge the different organizing styles of community groups and unions, how to deal with the government, the cops, the bosses, the media and so on.

It described how to set up transportation, emergency and medical services; train pickets; map out the cities; create short- and long-term plans; set up a general staff to organize and run the strike.

Most important were the examples of how the Canadian movement refused to recognize that violating workers' rights was "legal" and instead declared the struggle legal.

Thus, while the union leadership in this country had basically no experience in calling a general strike, a wealth of information was available on how to go about it.

However, on the Wisconsin website, right next to the document on the general strike, was a memorandum on legal rights virtually declaring that any move toward a general strike or any other strike against the state was illegal and put the union and its members in jeopardy of fines and arrests.

The labor leadership in Wisconsin, in the crunch, was silent on the general strike. Instead it turned its attention to the movement to recall Republican legislators and to the prospect of having the law overturned in the courts.

The entire weight of the decision to call a general strike cannot be left on the shoulders of state leaders alone. In such a momentous decision, the state and local leadership must know they are challenging the entire ruling class. It was incumbent on the national labor leadership to declare openly that it would wholeheartedly support such a crucial struggle, where the fate of public employees is at stake. While AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka appeared at support rallies, he never once pointed in the direction of the class struggle, hewing to the line of support for the Democratic Party.

The workers were not defeated in some great class battle with the capitalist state. The setback came about because the labor leaders would not use the strength, energy and determination exhibited by the workers to overcome false claims of capitalist "legality" handed down by the legislature and the courts. Instead, the leaders bowed to capitalist rulings.

There is nothing wrong in principle with using the recall method to get rid of reactionary legislators, nor to use the courts on occasion to enforce the rights of the working class.

What is wrong, however, is to rely on these methods. Parliamentary and judicial methods can at best be secondary when the struggle is with the capitalist class and its state. Only the class struggle, which challenges the class power of the bosses and their state, can bring any significant, lasting victory in the struggle.

The only way to get there is for the rank and file of the labor movement to organize from the ground up, build caucuses to promote the class struggle against the bosses and their state and either force the union leaders to fight or push them aside and take the unions over from below.

Wisconsin ‘Truth Tour’ kicks off

By Bryan G. Pfeifer, Milwaukee, Wis., Jul 20, 2011

The Wisconsin AFL-CIO’s “Truth Tour,” which kicked off July 16 at the Teamster’s Hall in Green Bay, is traveling throughout the state until at least Aug. 2. The tour will make stops in Baraboo, Hudson, Kenosha, La Crosse, Milwaukee, Oshkosh and Rhinelander. The tour’s goal is to be a forum for poor and working people to meet and work together, give testimony on how Wall Street’s attacks are affecting them, and discuss fightback strategies, including mobilizing for recall campaigns.

“What we have seen in Madison is disastrous,” said Mahlon Mitchell, president of the Wisconsin State Professional Fire Fighters. “We have seen child labor laws weakened, voter suppression bills enacted, earned income tax credits increased on the poor, cuts to BadgerCare and Medicare. This is no longer Wisconsin. This is the United Corporations of America.”

On July 12 the six Democratic candidates endorsed by the Wisconsin AFL-CIO won recall primaries; they will now run in the general election Aug. 9. Those engaging in the recall campaigns are enraged by the union-busting bill that went into effect June 29 as well as the draconian 2011-2013 state budget.

“It is clear that [Gov.] Scott Walker and GOP legislators are putting big corporations and wealthy campaign donors above what is best for me, my family and the people of Wisconsin,” said Jason Albertz at the Truth Tour kick-off. Albertz, a paraprofessional educator from Green Bay, works with special education students at Webster Elementary School.

Besides the recall campaigns, the people of Wisconsin are engaging in numerous acts of resistance, including confronting Gov. Walker and his allies wherever they go in the state.

Quotes are from the Wisconsin AFL-CIO blog: wisafcio.typepad.com. For more information and to get involved in the struggle, visit www.defendwisconsin.org, www.wisafcio.org, www.vdlf.org, and www.wibailoutpeople.org. □

Mahlon Mitchell,
President of
the Wisconsin
Firefighters union,
speaks at the state
capitol in Madison
June 14.
WW photo:
Bryan G. Pfeifer



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