

Full support to Wisconsin workers!

Patrick Martin
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The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party call on all working people to come to the defense of the Wisconsin public employees in their fight against the destruction of wages, benefits, working conditions and democratic rights.

Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker and the Republican-controlled state legislature are moving to slash wages, gut health benefits and undermine pensions, while at the same time imposing a legal straitjacket on public employees, stripping them of collective bargaining rights over anything but wages, and requiring any wage rise above the rate of inflation to be approved by a statewide referendum vote.

No such controls are proposed, of course, for the gargantuan salaries of corporate CEOs or the windfall profits of the banks and big business. Nor will there be any limits imposed on the financial institutions that handle the issuing of state bonds—headed by Citigroup, the lead underwriter. The “sacrifices” decreed by the governor apply only to working people: Walker has actually increased the state deficit to provide tax cuts for Wisconsin-based corporations.

Tens of thousands of workers throughout Wisconsin have already gone into action against this assault on fundamental social and democratic rights. They have marched through the city of Madison on a daily basis, packed into the halls of the State Capitol, and staged protests and walkouts throughout the state.

Wisconsin state employees, school teachers, firefighters and other local government workers have been joined by private sector workers, university and high school students, and thousands of other working people who correctly recognize that the destruction of living standards and basic rights for public employees will have devastating consequences for the entire working class.

This class mobilization must be intensified and extended on the broadest possible basis, through the

organization of a general strike of all workers in Wisconsin to put a stop to the attack on public employees. To wage such a struggle requires the building of new organizations, rank-and-file action committees of workers and students to unite public sector and private sector workers as well as youth in the workplaces, schools and neighborhoods.

The working class cannot allow this struggle to be channeled behind the perspective advanced by the state AFL-CIO and the teachers union WEAC, of putting pressure on Democratic and Republican state legislators to delay or block the legislation. Workers should oppose and denounce the position taken by the union leaders that cuts in pay and benefits are acceptable provided that the unions themselves are involved in negotiating them.

There is a vast social gulf between the instinctive and heartfelt opposition to the cuts on the part of rank-and-file workers and the posturing and demagoguery by the union officials, who *support* the cuts so long as their own role and income from the dues checkoff, and the salaries and the perks of the privileged union bureaucracy, are maintained.

Thus Marty Beil, head of the Wisconsin State Employees Union, said yesterday: “We are prepared to implement the financial concessions proposed to help bring our state's budget into balance, but ... we will not—I repeat we will not—be denied our rights to collectively bargain.” This only begs the question, however: what is there to bargain over if one starts by agreeing to all the concessions?

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka declared at Friday's rally in Madison that the unions recognize and accept the economic reasons for cuts in state government. Who gave them that right? Trumka does not speak for workers struggling to get by on their existing salaries, under conditions of accelerating inflation, or facing the gutting of healthcare and

pension plans. He speaks for the fifth column of highly paid officials who have transformed the unions into the enforcers of corporate and government demands for austerity and wage-cutting.

The main goal of Trumka & Co. in Wisconsin is to prevent an uncontrollable explosion in which the working class actually demonstrates its enormous social power and exposes the weakness and isolation of the ultra-right politicians like Governor Walker. There is no question that the vast majority of the population of Wisconsin sympathizes with the state workers and will support them in a serious and sustained struggle. The AFL-CIO regards such an offensive by the working class as a disaster to be prevented at all costs.

The AFL-CIO aims to divert workers away from an all-out struggle against the Walker administration by boosting illusions in the Democratic Party, hailing the protest stunt by Democratic state legislators who have temporarily blocked the legislation by leaving the state and preventing a quorum. It will seek to shut down the growing strike movement in favor of appeals to the courts, the Obama administration and, ultimately, a campaign for the Democrats in the 2012 elections.

The truth is, however, that the Democratic Party is conducting identical attacks on workers at the local, state and federal level. The brutal attacks on Wisconsin workers are not unique to their state, but are taking place in every region of the country. Democratic governors in New York, North Carolina, Illinois and California are demanding similar cuts in wages and pensions, slashing jobs and attacking democratic rights such as the right to strike.

As for Obama, he has already demonstrated his class solidarity with Governor Walker by imposing a two-year freeze on federal workers and targeting public school teachers for attacks on seniority and job security. The Obama administration is now proposing a budget that demands working people pay, through cuts in domestic social spending, for the deficits produced by the bailout of Wall Street, tax cuts for the wealthy, and imperialist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The only difference between the two parties is that the Democrats make use of the unions as an instrument for enforcing the cuts, while the Republicans propose to dispense with the unions altogether. This difference is of utmost importance to the union officials—their incomes and privileges are at stake—but the end result

for the workers is the same.

Workers in Wisconsin and those who support them nationwide must recognize that the first requirement of a struggle against the destruction of jobs, wages, benefits and democratic rights is a political break with both of the parties of big business, the Democrats as well as the Republicans. The working class must mobilize all the oppressed—workers, youth, the unemployed, the elderly—in the building of a new mass political party based on a socialist program.

Many of the workers demonstrating in Wisconsin have carried signs comparing Walker to ousted Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak, and expressing the desire to carry out a rebellion that is as powerful and liberating as that conducted by Egyptian workers over the last month. There is a profound objective truth expressed in this instinctive identification with the struggles of the international working class.

Like the workers in Egypt, the workers in Wisconsin are being propelled into struggle by the crisis and breakdown of the world capitalist system. Like them, they are as yet without the organizations, leadership and political program that are necessary for victory. Only the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* are working on an international basis to build the revolutionary alternative that is required.

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