

One-sided war in Wisconsin

Patrick Martin
25 February 2011

Two incidents connected to the ongoing mass protests in Wisconsin underscore the utter ruthlessness of the ruling class in its determination to drive down the living conditions of workers, not only in that state but throughout the United States.

Jeff Cox, the Republican deputy attorney general of Indiana, recently told the liberal magazine *Mother Jones* that he favored “live ammunition” as the response to the protests in Wisconsin. He described workers protesting benefit cuts and attacks on their legal rights as “political enemies” and “thugs” and declared, “You’re damned right I advocate deadly force.” Cox, a state attorney for eight years, was fired Wednesday after the magazine published the exchange.

A blogger from a pro-union web site in Buffalo, New York contacted Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker Tuesday, posing as billionaire David Koch, one of the leading backers of corporate union-busting and the ultra-right Tea Party movement. The blogger, Ian Murphy, recorded the call and published the transcript Wednesday.

In the course of a 20-minute conversation, Murphy elicited a series of provocative remarks from the Republican governor. Walker suggested that felony charges could be trumped up against Democratic state senators who had blocked passage of his anti-union legislation by fleeing the state, offered to negotiate with his opponents using a baseball bat, and discussed the pros and cons of “planting some troublemakers” in the crowds demonstrating outside the state capitol.

The most noteworthy—and much less reported—passage in Walker’s discussion with the *faux* Koch came at the end, where he recounted a conversation with his cabinet on February 6. Walker noted the 100th birthday of Ronald Reagan, and cited “one of the most defining moments of his political career, not just his presidency, when he fired the air traffic controllers.” The coming confrontation in

Wisconsin “is our time to change the course of history,” Walker told his cabinet.

These two exposés give a glimpse of the political reality that is normally covered up by the American media—the ruthlessness and brutality, not merely of two individuals, but of an entire social class. Cox and Walker were not just speaking for themselves, but for the privileged financial elite that is prepared to use violence to achieve its ends. This kind of language is similar to what would have been used by Mubarak in Egypt or Gaddafi in Libya as they prepared a brutal crackdown.

Walker & Co. see the attacks on state workers not as a series of disconnected episodes, but as part of a broader struggle to crush the working class and turn back the clock by decades, in terms of workers’ social rights. This attack is being waged in states throughout the country as well as by the federal government, under both Democratic and Republican Party leadership.

Workers must understand the nature of the conflict they find themselves in. They face a ruling elite that has declared war. While the ruling class is politically mobilized, with two parties working consciously to achieve its ends, workers have yet to build mass organizations capable of countering this attack and advancing the interests of the vast majority of the population.

The American trade unions are incapable of defending themselves, let alone the working class. In Wisconsin, officials of the state employee and teachers’ unions openly embrace all the cuts demanded by Walker in the income, benefits and workplace rights of the workers. They are balking only at those demands—ending the dues check-off and automatic union recognition—that threaten their own incomes.

Decades of labor-management collaboration, anti-communism and denial of the class struggle—in which the very term “working class” was banned and replaced

by “middle class”—have separated the interests of the trade unions from those of the working class.

As the ruling elite is waging a ruthless struggle to defend its ill-gotten wealth, the unions are irreconcilably hostile to a socialist struggle based on the expropriation of the financial aristocracy and the coming to power of the working class.

Instead, they tie the working class politically to the Democratic Party, a big business party whose representatives, no less than the Republicans, defend the profits of the giant corporations and the wealth of the ultra-rich. In state after state, Democratic governors are making the same demands on public employees as Walker, only preferring to use the unions to help extract concessions from the workers.

Indeed, the Obama administration is one of the main agents of the financial aristocracy’s war on the workers. As his administration pours trillions into bank bailouts and bonuses for Wall Street executives, he adamantly refuses to help bankrupt state and local governments. He is also imposing wage freezes on federal workers while preparing a budget with hundreds of billions of dollars in cuts aimed overwhelmingly at working people.

Three years into the biggest crisis of the capitalist system since the Great Depression, the American political system has revealed its class character in the most brazen possible fashion. The Democrats and Republicans rescue billionaires and corporations, while demonizing schoolteachers and street sweepers as “overpaid” and “privileged.”

For millions of working people, the events in Wisconsin are a wake-up call. The working class must recognize—as its enemies surely do—that it faces a serious and protracted struggle. The conflicts in Wisconsin, and in other states and cities throughout the country, are not separate and isolated events, but part of an ongoing class war.

To prevail in this struggle, the working class requires a new political perspective and new fighting organizations. Workers must consciously take up the struggle against the capitalist system. They must answer the claims that there is “no money” for basic social needs like education, housing and health care, with demands for the confiscation of the wealth of the billionaires and the transfer of the giant corporations to public ownership.

This means a political break with the Democratic and Republican parties and the building of the Socialist Equality Party as a mass party fighting for socialism and internationalism in the working class.

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