

# The political issues in the fight against budget cuts

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The struggle of Wisconsin workers against the attack launched by the administration of Governor Scott Walker is now entering its third week. Opposition to the governor's demands for huge cuts in social spending and the unilateral abrogation of workers' rights remains overwhelming. Despite the bitter cold, more than 100,000 workers demonstrated in Madison, the state capital, on Saturday. Demonstrations on Saturday were the largest so far. There is growing sentiment for strike action involving all private and public sector workers throughout the state.

The significance and implications of this conflict extend far beyond Wisconsin. The actions of the Walker administration, which have a distinctly dictatorial odor, are the spearhead of a ruthless nationwide assault on the working class. Three years after the onset of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s—brought on by the criminal financial speculation of the capitalist oligarchy that rules the United States—the attack on working people's living standards and democratic rights is escalating. The corporate and financial interests that were the beneficiaries of the multitrillion-dollar bailout of 2008-2009 are demanding that the resulting bankruptcy of states and the country as a whole be paid for by the working class.

This is the political and social essence of the demands for wage freezes and actual cuts, the slashing of hard-won and vital benefits, the destruction of countless thousands of jobs, and the elimination of socially critical services. The cuts that are being planned, demanded and implemented threaten to set the working class back not only decades, but even generations.

In this historical context, Walker is only one of the most ruthless political representatives of the corporate and financial oligarchy that is deadly serious about

turning the clock back to the 1920s, before the great working class uprising of the 1930s set into motion the social transformation of the United States. For Walker, it is not enough to cut the benefits of teachers and other public employees and to eviscerate health care and social programs. He is also demanding the ending of any form of collective bargaining, even in the ineffectual and cowardly form in which it is practiced by the existing trade unions. For Walker—and the sections of the capitalist class for which he speaks—the central target is not simply the trade unions. His real aim is to wipe out any form or possibility of organized resistance by the working class to the dictates of the financial-corporate oligarchy and the capitalist state.

The response to this attack by the trade union organizations in Wisconsin and nationally—AFSCME, the NEA and the AFL-CIO—is cowardly, duplicitous and politically bankrupt. From the outset, they act as if there is no connection between Walker's assault on the organizational interests of the union—such as his demand for the elimination of collective bargaining and the end of the automatic dues check off—and the attack on the wages, benefits and jobs of public service workers. They insist again and again that they are prepared to go along with all these attacks, as long as the governor does not disturb long-established legal prerogatives of the unions.

Behind the unions' spineless response to Walker's attack is a definite political calculation. The union leaders know full well that resistance to the Walker administration's demands for massive budget cuts would set a precedent that would cut across the deals that are being worked out with Democratic Party governors in many other and, in some cases, much larger states. In a Sunday morning interview on NBC's "Meet the Press," AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka

insisted that the unions were willing to assume responsibility for the economic crisis. “And those governors,” he added, “that are willing to sit down and work with their employees can actually work out problems. We can solve them.”

What, then, is the AFL-CIO’s bottom line argument? There is no need, it is saying, to attack the legal prerogatives and dues base of the unions. The AFL-CIO is willing and fully prepared to collaborate with state governments, Democratic and Republican alike, to achieve their financial and budgetary objectives.

But where does this leave the working class? The answer is: Without jobs, without adequate wages and salaries, without essential benefits and social services, without adequate schools and hospitals, without basic democratic rights, and without a future.

In this critical situation, the working class has no choice but to continue and expand its fight. But it must recognize what it is fighting and understand what it is fighting for. Working people confront not merely various reactionary governors. Rather, the working class finds itself engaged in a great class struggle against the capitalist system itself. This conflict has far-reaching political and ultimately revolutionary implications.

The demands being made by Governor Walker and state administrations throughout the country, Democratic and Republican alike and, it must be stressed, by the Obama administration itself, testify to the failure of the capitalist profit system. The subordination of workers’ living standards and the essential social needs of a modern and immensely complex society to the capitalists’ insatiable drive for profit and the accumulation of personal wealth is no longer tolerable.

Working people, as they reflect on the conditions that exist in the United States and the world, must come to the conclusion that nothing less than a fundamental change in the economic and political organization of society is necessary—that is, from capitalism to socialism.

The development of the struggle of workers in Wisconsin, its expansion throughout the country and around the world, depends critically on the fight for a socialist program and perspective. The Socialist Equality Party, *World Socialist Web Site*, and International Students for Social Equality are

sponsoring a series of conferences throughout the country in April to discuss the organizational forms and political program needed for this new period of working-class struggle. We urge all our readers and all those who want to carry out a serious fight against the policies of the ruling class to make plans to attend today.

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