

Wisconsin struggle at the crossroads

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The struggle against Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker's attack on public workers' living standards and workplace rights and his plan to slash education and health care has reached the crossroads. As the determination of workers to fight the cuts hardens, state Democrats are searching for a way to cave in to the Republican governor's demands.

In an article Monday entitled "Democrats to End Union Standoff," the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Democratic state senators who fled Wisconsin "said Sunday they planned to come back from exile soon." According to the newspaper, the state Senate minority leader, Mark Miller, and his fellow Democrats "intend to let the full Senate vote on Gov. Walker's 'budget repair' bill, which includes the proposed limits on public unions' collective-bargaining rights."

Miller thinks, the article continued, "recent polls showing voter discontent with Mr. Walker over limits on bargaining rights have been 'disastrous' for the governor and Republicans and give Democrats more leverage to seek changes in a broader two-year budget bill Mr. Walker proposed Tuesday."

In a letter to Walker released Monday, Miller wrote, "I assure you that Democratic state senators, despite our differences and the vigorous debate we have had, remain ready and willing to find a reasonable compromise."

The claim that surrendering to Walker will make the Republican governor more willing to compromise is an insult to workers' intelligence. The passage of the bill and the virtual illegalization of any collective resistance will only embolden Walker and his backers to escalate their class-war agenda.

Any "reasonable compromise" worked out by Walker and the Democrats will have disastrous consequences for the working class. As the governor has made clear, the passage of the budget repair bill and the gutting of collective bargaining rights is only a prelude to the

destruction of tens of thousands of jobs, even deeper wage and benefit concessions, and the dismantling of basic services upon which the state's 5.6 million residents depend.

The fight against the budget cuts must be deepened and extended. A new road of struggle, independent of the Democratic Party and the trade union apparatus, must be found.

From the beginning, the Democrats have insisted that the working class must pay for the state's budget deficit. They have boasted that they carried out the deepest cuts in the history of the state under Walker's Democratic predecessor, Governor Jim Doyle. Nationally, Democratic governors in California, New York, Illinois and other states—along with President Obama on the federal level—are carrying out austerity policies and attacks on public employees no less brutal than those of Walker.

In Wisconsin and throughout the country, the unions are collaborating with the Democrats in enforcing cuts. While the Republicans want to destroy the unions, along with any legal basis for organized resistance by the working class, the Democrats see the unions as an asset in pushing through devastating attacks on public workers and the services they provide.

The fight in Wisconsin arose outside of the control of the trade unions, which responded to Walker's bill with nothing more than a lobbying campaign and pro forma protests. To their surprise, however, 20,000 workers marched on the state capital of Madison on February 15, and this was followed by a wave of high school walkouts, job actions by teachers and the occupation of the state capitol building on the eve of the vote by the Republican-controlled legislature. Fearing an explosion if the bill passed, the Democratic state senators left the state to postpone a vote.

As Greg Junemann, president of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers and

a member of the AFL-CIO's executive council, said last week, "This thing rose from the streets of Wisconsin, and if you've got any brains as a leader, you see a parade, you get out in front of it." For the union apparatus the purpose of getting out in front of the movement was to contain and ultimately strangle it.

The announcement by the leaders of the Wisconsin teachers and state employees unions that they would accept all of Walker's economic demands, if only he left intact their legal status and ability to collect dues, made a mockery of their pretensions of conducting a fight.

Once the Democrats return, the unions will do everything in their power to get people off the streets and divert popular opposition into seeking the recall of Republican state senators and campaigning for the election of Democrats.

Increasingly, workers in Wisconsin and throughout the country are recognizing that they face all-out war at the hands of the corporate elite and its political representatives. The enemy is determined to impoverish the working class and strip it of any means of defending itself.

This class war on the part of the ruling elite must be met with an equally determined response from the working class. For this, workers need their own organizations and a new leadership.

Rank-and-file committees of teachers, nurses and other workers should be elected in all workplaces to make preparations for the launching of a general strike, which will have as its aim the bringing down of the Walker administration. This struggle must oppose all cuts and demand an increase in spending for public education, health care and other social needs.

The claim that there is no money for these services must be rejected with contempt. Behind this lie is the uncritical acceptance of the vast social inequality that dominates American society, with unbounded wealth for a tiny elite at the top and growing poverty and hardship for the masses of working people. The combined budget deficit of all 50 states is less than one-tenth of the wealth of the richest 400 individuals in the United States.

The industrial mobilization of workers in Wisconsin would win immediate support from workers throughout the country and around the world and encourage a counteroffensive by the working class in defense of

jobs, living standards and basic social rights.

This is a struggle not just against one Republican governor, but against the entire capitalist system, which is inimical to the basic needs and interests of working people.

It is a political struggle whose goal must be the establishment of a workers' government. The working class must break with the Democrats and the two-party system and build a mass socialist movement.

The attacks on the working class can be ended only through the revolutionary transformation of the American and world economy, including a radical redistribution of wealth and reorganization of economic life based on human need, not private profit.

The Socialist Equality Party is leading the fight for a mass socialist movement of the working class. We urge all workers and young people in Wisconsin to make the decision to join our party.

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