

No surrender to Walker! For a general strike by all Wisconsin workers!

Socialist Equality Party
12 March 2011

The bill signed into law by Governor Scott Walker Friday is a historic assault on the working class. It is aimed at criminalizing any organized resistance to the destruction of jobs, wages, education and other social services. It marks a major step toward an open dictatorship of the corporations.

In corporate boardrooms and executive suites the new law is being hailed as a turning point in the class war against US workers. In its lead editorial, the *Wall Street Journal* sent its congratulations to the Wisconsin Republicans and declared that Walker's "victory" should be a "lesson for other states and governors."

In Wisconsin, workers reacted with anger. Thousands descended on the state capitol building in Madison Wednesday night. The sentiment for a general strike is growing.

The unions, however, have responded with cowardice and capitulation, reminiscent of the AFL-CIO's reaction to Reagan's firing of the PATCO air traffic controllers in 1981. Working with state Democrats, Wisconsin union officials have ordered workers to report to work and take no further action.

Wisconsin AFL-CIO leader Phil Neuenfeldt and other union officials have told workers they have no recourse other than an impotent campaign to recall Republicans and elect Democrats to the state legislature. Walker and his corporate backers welcome this abject surrender. It gives them a free hand to strip workers of their most basic rights, a process that will start Sunday when contracts for 39,000 state workers expire. The new law will result in a pay cut for state employees that will produce immense social hardship.

None of this is of any concern to the union executives. From the very beginning the union officials were concerned only with their own institutional and financial interests. They pledged to work with Walker

to impose \$330 million in wage and benefit concessions if he allowed them to retain their legal status and the automatic dues check-off.

AFL-CIO leader Richard Trumka sarcastically thanked Walker in a speech before the National Press Club in Washington, DC, saying the Republican governor's "overreach" would produce a backlash in favor of the Democrats and encourage more people to join the unions. This statement combines indifference over the impact of the bill on the working class with stupidity. In fact, a victory by Walker will embolden corporate-backed politicians around the country to implement similar attacks. Anti-worker measures are already being planned or implemented in Ohio, Indiana, Michigan and other states.

The basic purpose of the recall campaign is to end the militant protests that spread throughout the state this past month and silence the demand for a general strike. Its central political aim is to channel opposition behind the Democratic Party, based on the lie that the Democrats support workers. Wisconsin workers suffered eight years of wage freezes, furloughs and other attacks under Walker's Democratic predecessor, Governor Jim Doyle.

Like the Republicans, Democratic governors throughout the country are determined to make the working class pay for budget deficits through cuts in education, health care and wages. These deficits are the result of the economic meltdown caused by Wall Street speculators and the bailouts and tax cuts to the rich that have followed.

From Obama on down to the state and local level, the Democrats have conducted a vicious attack on the jobs and living standards of workers—but they have done so with the assistance of the unions. Even were the recall campaign to succeed in replacing every targeted

Republican with a Democrat, the cuts in wages, health care and education would remain.

Commenting on Wisconsin, Obama's press secretary said the president believes "everyone needs to share in the sacrifice, including public sector workers." Rather than vilifying public employees, he added, the president believed budgets should be slashed by "bringing them into the process," i.e., working with the unions to slash the pay of their members and gut social programs.

Workers cannot live with these attacks. The capitulation of the unions must be rejected and preparations made now to unite the full strength of the working class in a general strike. This should be based on the following demands:

- * Total rejection of all economic concessions and social spending cuts. Instead of cuts, social spending should be increased in response to the crisis facing millions of people throughout the country.

- * Unequivocal rejection of any and all restrictions on the legal right of workers to negotiate and strike to defend and improve their standard of living.

- * A substantial increase in taxes on corporate profits and the income of the rich to close the budget deficit and the cost of new and essential social spending.

- * The immediate resignation of Walker and his reactionary administration. The governor has deliberately made himself the political spearhead of the corporate attack on the working class and the use of dictatorial methods.

Preparation for such a struggle must begin by electing rank-and-file strike committees, independent of the trade union apparatus, in every workplace. These committees should mobilize the support of public- and private-sector workers, young people, the unemployed, retirees and all those opposed to the attacks on democratic rights, wages and social services.

Pseudo-left groups like the International Socialist Organization are seeking to block such a struggle. They uphold the authority of the unions, promoting the fiction that these right-wing organizations, dedicated to suppressing the class struggle, can be pressured to fight. In this way they seek to channel working class opposition behind the Democratic Party.

The immediate surrender of the unions and their efforts to block any serious struggle underscore the fact that these outlived organizations cannot defend the working class. In the coming days, the unions will shift

even further to the right, supporting even greater attacks on workers in Wisconsin and other states in order to demonstrate their usefulness to the corporations and the state.

The fight in Wisconsin is not just against one Republican governor, but against a system that impoverishes the working class in order to increase the wealth of the richest two percent of the population. The capitalist system has failed, not only in the US but all over the world.

Only a revolutionary struggle by the working class to take political power in its own hands can break the economic dictatorship of the financial elite and reorganize the economy along socialist lines—to guarantee secure jobs, decent living standards, education, health care and other social rights.

To prepare the leadership for this struggle, the Socialist Equality Party, the International Students for Social Equality and the *World Socialist Web Site* are holding conferences across the country on the Fight for Socialism Today. We urge all workers and young people who want to defend the working class to attend.

Socialist Equality Party



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact