

# 100,000 march in Wisconsin to denounce anti-worker law

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More than 100,000 workers, young people and other protesters marched in the Wisconsin state capital of Madison Saturday in the largest of the month-long demonstrations against attacks on public employees and cuts in public education, health care and other services.

The huge turnout was in response to Friday's action by Governor Scott Walker, who signed into law his so-called "budget repair bill," which strips nearly all of Wisconsin's 300,000 state, county and municipal employees of collective bargaining rights and sharply reduce their take-home pay.

Workers flooded into the capital from all over the state. Many traveled hundreds of miles from Illinois, Nebraska, Iowa, Michigan and other states. Tens of thousands of teachers, firefighters, nurses and other public employees were joined by union and nonunion workers in construction, steel, auto and other private-sector industries.

The resistance of the working class has popular support from doctors, professors, lawyers and small businessmen, including restaurants and shops throughout Madison that are displaying signs denouncing Walker's measures. Hundreds of farmers from throughout the state, who are being hit by cuts in the state's BadgerCare health program along with the rise in fuel prices, organized a "tractorcade" to the capital and carried signs against the law, including one that said, "Farmers know what B.S. is."

Despite the best efforts of the media, the politicians and the trade union officials to smother class consciousness with their incessant talk of "middle-class workers," many signs at the demonstration reflected the growing recognition that workers are engaged in a class

struggle with the corporate and financial elite. There were references to "class war" and the French Revolution and demands to "Tax the Rich." One worker carried a sign with Marie Antoinette's body and Scott Walker's face, reading "Let them Eat Cake." Another held a picture of a guillotine with the slogan, "We've Had Enough Cake!"

"People are realizing this is class warfare," Gary, a teaching assistant at the University of Wisconsin, told the *World Socialist Web Site*. "They are waking up to the fact that there are two classes in this country."

The militant mood of the demonstrators was underscored by the popularity of the demand for a general strike. Signs calling for a general strike were widespread and the campaign by the Socialist Equality Party for a general strike to force the resignation of Walker won support, with many workers and students taking up the chant for a general strike in response to calls from SEP supporters on bullhorns.

"I'm from the old school. We have to hit them hard with a general strike," said a public employee from Janesville, whose father had been an auto worker at the now-closed General Motors plant. "I've said this all along—protesting is alright, but we have to get them where it hurts and shut the whole state down. That will make them talk to us."

SEP supporters handed out thousands of leaflets explaining the historic significance of the new law, which virtually criminalizes all forms of collective resistance by the working class, and the necessity of developing a socialist movement of the working class against capitalism and both corporate-backed parties.

The leaders of the state AFL-CIO and the Wisconsin Education Association, which negotiates for 98,000 teachers and school employees across the state, are working to oppose a general strike. At the rally

Saturday, union officials sought to divert popular opposition into a toothless campaign to recall several Republican state senators and elect Democrats.

The union officials presented the 14 Democratic state senators, who temporarily postponed a vote on Walker's bill by fleeing the state, as heroes—even though their party had carried out the deepest spending cuts in the history of the state over the previous eight years.

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In their remarks, the Democrats insisted that workers should stop the protests and clear the streets. "The fight now moves to the courthouse and the ballot box," declared state Representative Brett Hulsey, a Madison Democrat. State Senator Chris Larson, a Democrat from Milwaukee, said, "As we trade in rally signs for clipboards, as we head to the streets to recall the Republicans in one year, recall the governor that refuses to listen to you, stand strong."

Reverend Jesse Jackson, whose specialty over the last three decades has been to provide a benediction over each successive betrayal by the trade union bureaucracy, sought to associate the recall campaign on behalf of the Democrats with the civil rights battles of the 1960s. He went so far as to say workers should honor the memory of Martin Luther King Jr.—who was murdered on April 4, 1968—by voting for the Democrats on April 5. "Commemorate the life he gave up for freedom and justice on April fourth," Jackson declared. "But on April fifth, come alive. So come alive, April five!"

The purpose of the demagoguery was to conceal the fact that the trade unions had completely surrendered to Walker. From the beginning, the union executives were concerned only with protecting their narrow institutional interests—their legal status as official bargaining agents for the public employees and the automatic deduction of union dues from workers' paychecks. In an attempt to convince Walker to collaborate with them in imposing concessions and social spending cuts, as they had with Walker's Democratic predecessor, the union leaders from the start declared their acceptance of Walker's demands for sharp increases in workers' out-of-pocket contributions to their pensions and health coverage.

Among workers there is a determination to fight, and

this will escalate as they see hundreds of dollars stolen from their paychecks as a result of the concessions agreed to by the unions and feel the impact of \$1.5 billion in budget cuts. These struggles will come into a direct conflict with the union apparatus and the Democratic Party.

Linda, a county worker from Janesville, and her husband, a snow plow driver, spoke with the WSWS. "We're here to protect our rights," she said. "Good people who've been here for years are putting in their papers for retirement or are being forced to retire.

"These cuts are really going to affect our wallets. We have three kids, one of whom is in college. We're already strapped and living paycheck to paycheck. These cuts could mean \$6,000 to \$8,000 less for us each year. Our son is a student on the dean's list at UW-Platteville, but we're worried about how these cuts are going to affect his education.

"We'll be protected by our union contract for two more years, but after that our boss will be able to fire us for any reason, just because he doesn't like what we're doing. They'll fire people who've been doing these jobs for a long time and hire a kid off the street for next to nothing."



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