

Walker must go! For a general strike in Wisconsin!

3 March 2011

The budget presented by Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker on Tuesday has caused profound shock and outrage among workers throughout the state. It has now become clear to hundreds of thousands of Wisconsin workers and their families that they are confronted with a ruthless attempt to drastically lower their living standards, eviscerate crucial social services and benefits, and strip away their democratic rights.

Walker is demanding cuts of at least \$1.5 billion from the state's budget to close a deficit that has been created, to a great extent, by his recent massive reduction of tax rates for large corporations.

These cuts include:

\$1.25 billion in cuts to school aid and local government, including a reduction of more than \$900 million in education funding statewide, which translates into a cut of approximately \$500 per pupil.

\$500 million in cuts from Medicaid, which finances critical state health programs for more than one million Wisconsin residents. The impact on low-income and uninsured adults and families with children will be devastating.

\$250 million will be cut from funding for the University of Wisconsin. Moreover, as part of a scheme that will serve the interests of top corporations, the Madison branch of the University of Wisconsin will be carved off from the state system. This will gut the wages and workplace rights of 17,000 UW workers and lead to a sharp increase in college tuition costs over the next two years.

The Walker budget document is a declaration of war. His inclusion of further demands for the elimination of collective bargaining follows logically from his budget proposals. The cuts that he is calling

for make a mockery of "bargaining," because his budget proposals require, by their very nature, the complete surrender by workers to his unilateral demands.

The oft-repeated position of union officials—that they are prepared to accept Walker's budget cuts if only he steps back from his demand for an end to collective bargaining—is not only cowardly, it represents a dangerous evasion of the political reality that exists in Wisconsin.

The term "collective bargaining" means nothing at all if unions are prepared to accept the dictates of state governments, which are acting in the interests of the capitalist bosses of the banks and industry. Collective bargaining did not emerge in the form of a permission slip granted by generous corporations to the workers. It was wrested from the capitalist class in the course of decades of bitter conflict for social and democratic rights, in which countless thousands of workers' lives were lost. In the final analysis, collective bargaining existed only to the extent that workers were prepared to exercise the weapon of the strike to overcome the intransigence of the capitalist class and its political hirelings in local, state and federal government.

Walker's budget signifies in practice, if not yet in law, the collapse of collective bargaining. His administration is ramming a brutal and socially destructive budget down the throats of Wisconsin working people and their families.

How should the working class in Wisconsin respond to this political reality?

In recent days, there has been a growing realization among working people throughout Wisconsin that protests in the state capital are insufficient and that

they must escalate their struggle.

Sentiment is building for a general strike by the working class. Wisconsin workers, in ever greater numbers, are coming to realize that nothing short of a massive mobilization of their collective strength will be sufficient to beat back the attack of the Walker administration.

This sentiment is justified and corresponds to the political reality that exists in Wisconsin and, increasingly, throughout the United States. The collapse of collective bargaining—that is, the attempt of the state to impose, with the implicit threat of force, intolerable and unacceptable demands upon workers—has a profound objective significance. The ruling class is telling working people: “We do not negotiate. We demand. You must accept our terms.”

This signifies, in effect, the end of compromise between the classes. The growing recognition of this political reality among workers lies behind the rising sentiment for a general strike.

It is necessary for workers who have come to this conclusion to build the momentum for a general strike. Talk about a general strike must turn toward its actual preparation.

In every work place, meetings should be called to discuss, debate and vote on a resolution for a general strike. Wherever substantial support exists for a general strike, rank-and-file committees, independent of union officials, should be formed to prepare for this action.

This movement should base the call for a general strike on the following demands:

- * Total rejection of all economic concessions by the Wisconsin workers. Instead, social spending should be increased to meet the pressing problems created by three years of recession caused by the criminal speculative activities of the banks.

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

- * For a substantial increase in taxes on corporate profits and the very rich to cover the budget deficit and the costs of new and essential social spending.

- * For the immediate resignation of Governor

Walker and his reactionary administration. Walker has deliberately made himself the political spearhead of the corporate attack on the working class and the use of dictatorial methods. The demand for his removal from office arises from the recognition that the struggle of Wisconsin workers against this budget is, in essence, a political struggle.

The call for Walker’s removal does not imply a vote of confidence in the Democratic Party. Beyond the borders of Wisconsin there are Democratic Party governors and mayors who are calling for budget cuts no less draconian than those sought by Walker. The Obama administration is collaborating with the state governors and the Congress in Washington in the implementation of budget cuts that will wreak havoc on the lives of workers throughout the country.

However, inspired by the example set by Wisconsin workers, the fight against the attacks on workers’ rights will expand from state to state and across the country as a whole, in opposition to all the political representatives of the capitalist class.

Thus, the demand for Walker’s removal raises the most important issue of all—the necessity for workers to create their own, independent, socialist alternative to the corporate-controlled Republican and Democratic parties.

The Socialist Equality Party supports and encourages the movement for a general strike against the Walker administration and its reactionary budget. The growing sentiment among workers that such action is necessary testifies to the intensity of social conflict in the United States. However, we urge workers to recognize that they are fighting not just one governor, but the capitalist class as a whole and the profit system upon which its rule is based.

David North

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