

February 24, 2011 - IN SUPPORT OF THE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING RIGHTS OF WORKERS

Approved by the National Committee of the Social Democrats USA on 02-24-2011

The National Committee of the Social Democrats USA views with abhorrence the right wing, tea party inspired efforts to roll back the collective bargaining rights of public employees i.e. firemen, teachers, police, human service workers, etc in states such as Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana and others. What is clear to us is that these political forces whose spokesmen ironically regularly describe groups or individuals advocating even minimal rights for the poor and working people as proponents of class warfare, are themselves conducting a brutal class war against working class and poor Americans. Their plan is obviously to use the current budget crisis of states, a crisis caused primarily by the great recession of 2008 as an excuse to conduct brutal class war against working class people and their unions.

The fulfillment of this plan in addition to the total subjection of workers will also have the additional benefit from the perspective of the Republican Right of radically reducing the ability of unions to support the Democratic Party in future election campaigns. Given the new political environment caused by the Supreme Court's "Citizens United" decision last year to allow unlimited campaign spending by corporations it is vitally important that the American Labor movement retain its ability to balance this influence with its own.

Advocates for ending most of the rights of public workers to collectively bargain with state and local governments argue that real sacrifices must be made to balance state budgets. This is true. However why we ask is it that the workers who provide for the education, safety, and general needs of the public and the safety net for the poor must make the lion share of the sacrifices? These individuals will respond that ordinary non public workers have it very bad and that public workers should have it equally as bad. They also attempt to portray public employees as living off the public trough and as having plush undeserving comfortable lives, thus attempting to excite envy and rage of the non unionized work force. What public employee unions have done under collective bargaining laws has been to provide their members with decent income, pension, and health insurance benefits.

The arguments for ending the collective bargaining rights of public employees of Wisconsin's Governor Scott Walker, Ohio's Governor John Kasich, and Co. are based on lies. The first lie is that public employee are over paid. Based on their age and educational levels - about half of public employees are university graduates - public workers make some what less in total benefits i.e. wages, pensions, and health benefits than workers in the private sector in the same age and educational categories. Thus public employees are not over compensated.

The second lie is that the collective bargaining rights of public employees need to be gutted in order to balance state and local government budgets. The fact is that the recent budget deficits in states such as Wisconsin, Ohio, and Pennsylvania were caused by the Wall Street induced recession of 2008. We have to wonder why the Wall Street bankers and investment firms which in fact did cause the recession are not being required by the Teapartyers and Right wing Republicans to make any sacrifices? Why are only public employees being scapegoated? The hypocrisy of Walker, Kasich and their like minded compatriots is obvious. The other major cause of the current crisis in state budgets has been the systematic gutting of state systems of taxation by Republican Party dominated governments. In both Ohio and Wisconsin the taxes of corporations and the very rich has in recent years been radically reduced by right wing governments. For example in Ohio about \$2 billion dollars, a quarter of the state's \$8 billion dollar two year deficit, has been caused by the Republican inspired cuts in both income and corporate taxes in 2005.

A final point which shows up the lies of the enemies of labor is that over the past years public employees in states such as Wisconsin and Ohio have been taking significant cuts in their total wage retirement and benefit packages. During the recent crisis in Wisconsin, public employee unions have already conceded that they will accept most of Governor Walker's proposed cuts to their livelihoods. What they will not accept is the complete abrogation of their human right to bargain collectively and thus to be co-decision makers regarding their own economic futures. What they will not accept is a future in which management makes all of the decisions regarding their future work lives and economic livelihoods.

Collective Bargaining is a relatively abstract phrase. It is easy for people to misunderstand its meaning. What it means is that workers have a right to bargain with management regarding the basic issues of their lives at the workplace. It allows them to have some degree of power over their future incomes, health benefits and working conditions. Collective bargaining ends the complete dictatorship that management generally has over workers. What the attempt to end collective bargaining by right wing governments in Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana and other states means is that workers are going to be led back to a full condition of wage slavery. Workers in these states will not accept this reintroduction of servitude without a furious struggle. The Social Democrats USA intends to be with the unions and workers in this struggle.