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Pro-union rallies spread, message deepens

By John Paul Holmes

Wisconsin's Capitol had more than 100,000 people Saturday, Feb. 26, all coming to support the state's public service workers in their fight against Republican Governor Scott Walker's plan to dismantle their freedom to join unions and exercise democracy in the places where they work.

Across the U.S. other rallies gathered over 30,000 more in solidarity with the workers' message.

In Indianapolis, nearly 25,000 people demonstrated against a plan to turn their state into another so-called "right to work" state after a weeks of demonstrations there successfully killed three bills which targeted the jobs of working families, their benefits, and the right to bargain collectively.

Ohio saw similar protests in its capital, Columbus.

From Alaska to Miami, and Maine to Hawaii, the chant was "We are all Wisconsin." And in Wisconsin, what was the message?

The labor movement has made itself clear: they are willing to work with state government in managing benefits to cope with the budget crisis and want to negotiate. It is Gov. Walker who will not negotiate, as his admitted goal is to dismantle



the unions themselves. The protests are against the parts of the budget bill that seek to put an end to the collective bargaining process and, consequently, destroy workers' freedom to determine the conditions of their work.

Numerous signs carried by school teachers called on Gov. Walker to sit at the bargaining table, and included the definition of the word negotiate to help him in case he misunderstood. (Story continues after slideshow.)

T H I S W E E K :

- **Pro-union rallies spread, message deepens**
- **Editorial: Obama's anti-DOMA move big step forward**
- **Nationwide actions urge full funding for Head Start**
- **"Shocking": Providence, R.I. officials fire all teachers**
- **Mi viaje a Madison en solidarid con los trabajadores**

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Public employee union, AFSCME's green placards reiterated the idea that the protesters stood for democracy with "It's about Freedom" printed across them in white.

This message has become widespread. While the benefits union membership results in are tan-

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gible and important, demonstrators are discussing how those benefits and protections are a result of the union as a democratic organization that represents them. The union provides workers with a voice. Unlike a private business, or a corporation with its restriction on decision making based on how much stock one can buy, unions represent all workers in an occupation through their participation and votes.

For many who feel the country has been hijacked by corporate power this model is appealing. It paves the way for discourse on power and how the economy itself might be made more democratic.

Being a long-time proponent of this vision of a democratic economy, I went to Madison on Saturday to witness the historic demonstrations there. I talked with many people who shared sentiments similar to mine. The lively corridors of the Capitol, walls covered with print-outs of statistics, messages of solidarity, and humorous signs, hummed with the sound of debate, discussion,

and music. The experience was surreal, which is somewhat sad because it also seemed to be exactly what self-government ought to be.

When it was time for me to leave I sought a volunteer on trash collection duty and recycled an extra flier I was handed.

Waiting for the buses that would take us back to the demonstrator parking, a public employee leaned over to a woman nearby and said "Hi, I'm one of the union thugs you've probably heard about."

She shook his hand and introduced herself as "the greedy teacher."

I couldn't help myself. "Hi," I said "I'm one of the Communists here today."

The teacher responded, "Uh-oh, Glenn Beck warned me about you!"

We all had a good laugh and left firm in our belief that, no matter what the corporate hegemony might say about it, we had stood as one.



J.P. Holmes is a writer and social media activist.

Obama's anti-DOMA move big step forward

By PW Editorial Board

A federal law that bans recognition of same-sex marriage is unconstitutional says the Obama administration.

Obama's historic decision, announced by Attorney General Eric Holder Wednesday, Feb. 23, represents a big victory for gay and lesbian rights against the discriminatory law, which, enacted in 1996, defines marriage as only between a man and a woman.

Obama's move is a great step forward and a tipping point for the gay rights movement. This will reach into issues of employment discrimination, family recognition and full equality rights for lesbian and gay people.

"The president's move is another step in the increasing realization that there is no conceivable justification for DOMA, that it is motivated, was motivated, purely by irrational considerations and fear," said U.S. Rep. Gerry Nadler, D-N.Y. "Hopefully, that will make it somewhat easier to pass legislation in Congress."

Bills to repeal DOMA are being introduced into the House and Senate.

However the legislative battle will be difficult especially since right-wing House Judiciary Chairman Lamar Smith, R-Texas, has wide latitude over what bills get a hearing. Smith criticized Obama's decision calling it "irresponsible."

In a letter written to House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, Holder said the president has concluded DOMA fails to meet a rigorous standard under which courts view with suspicion any laws targeting minority groups who have suffered a history of discrimination.

Over the years Obama has said he favors civil unions. However, we hope Obama's courageous stance on the issue could be a signal that the president would soon embrace full marriage equality.

There is no reason that LGBTQ couples should not share the same rights as straight couples, including marriage.

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Nationwide actions urge full funding for Head Start

By Marilyn Bechtel

We're the biggest supporters of parents working at low-wage jobs, teen parents who want to go back to school, special needs kids," said center director Hetzel Simbulan, as she stood in a brightly lit, colorfully decorated Oakland, Calif., Early Head Start classroom here.

Simbulan was worried because among \$61 billion in draconian cuts in the federal spending bill the Republican-dominated House of Representatives passed last week is \$1.1 billion in funding for Head Start. The 22.4 percent cut would eliminate some 218,000 places from the 45-year-old program.

By contrast, President Obama is calling for \$866 million more for Head Start, to maintain funding that was increased under the 2009 stimulus bill.

"I don't know what will happen to our children, and to our parents who are working, taking job training or going back to school, if these cuts go through," Simbulan said.

As a press conference got underway in the classroom, Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Calif., told reporters, "These are our sons, our daughters, our grandchildren, right here in this city. We all know how important these programs are to the many parents who depend on them, and the children they serve."

"They're talking about cutting domestic spending back to 2008, but they're cutting these programs and leaving defense. Cut defense!" she said.

Lee pointed out that the Head Start cuts would eliminate some 55,000 Head Start teachers.

Mayor Jean Quan said the city is fighting a similar struggle over the California budget, and



state cuts have already forced the school district to close many early childhood development centers.

Over 2,000 Oakland children and their families participate in Head Start and Early Head Start, at 31 centers around the city. The centers also provide "wrap-around" health and social services.

Both Lee and Quan called attention to the huge percentage of African American young men - 40 to 50 percent - who drop out of high school. "We need to take stock of our priorities and look at what Head Start has done with minimal amounts of money, and expand it with more resources so we can reduce that dropout rate," Lee said.

The elected officials, and the parents and children at the press conference, were part of nationwide actions this week in support of Head Start.

In Lewiston, Idaho, parents and children demonstrated at the office of Republican Rep. Raul Labrador. Jessica Powers, of nearly Clarkston, told the Morning Tribune, "The cuts they're trying to make are terrible. My youngest is going to be ready for kindergarten because of the program. Without Head Start, there would have been no way."

They're cutting these programs and leaving defense. Cut defense!

“Shocking”: Providence, R.I. officials fire all teachers

By Susan Webb

Shocking.” That was the response of American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten to the mass firing of every one of this city’s 1,926 public school teachers. The school board voted 4 to 3 Thursday night to approve the firings, despite an outpouring of 700 teachers who packed the school gymnasium where the board was meeting, to testify against the draconian action.

Mayor Angel Taveras, a newly elected liberal Democrat, had announced the planned move last week, saying the terminations were necessary to give the city more “flexibility” in dealing with a \$40 million school budget deficit. He says some schools will have to be closed next fall. He and school officials said they were driven by a March 1 deadline, set by state law, requiring school districts to notify teachers by that date if their jobs are in jeopardy for the next school year.

Addressing the board members, teachers begged them to issue layoff notices instead of firing them, because under the union contract, teachers are recalled from layoff based on seniority. With terminations, there is no guarantee that seniority would be followed in rehiring teachers.

Weingarten noted that “the district and the Providence Teachers Union have been working collaboratively on a groundbreaking, nationally recognized school transformation model.”

“A mass firing, announced in the middle of a school year, does not help solve a budget problem - the purported reason - but, rather, disrupts the education of all students and the entire community,” she said.

Mi viaje a Madison, Wisconsin, en solidaridad con los trabajadores

Por Jesús Alvarado

Con motivo de la propuesta del Gobernador Scott Walter de eliminar los derechos de los trabajadores públicos de Wisconsin, aprovechamos mi viaje de visita a Milwaukee para completar el trayecto Milwaukee - Madison el sábado pasado y contemplar el maravilloso espectáculo del pueblo de Wisconsin posesionado del principal edificio del Gobierno del Estado, el Capitolio de Wisconsin.

La peregrina propuesta del Gobernador, encontró eco en algunos comentarios periodísticos, como el que trae el New York Times, indicando que, después de este ataque del Gobernador, la solidaridad del público hacia el destino de los sindicatos de Wisconsin, se esta debilitando, porque algunos personas desempleadas, achacan la pérdida de empleos, los bajos salarios, a los privilegios que los empleados públicos han obtenido mediante los contratos colectivos.

Increible y tremendamente absurdo que la pérdida de empleos, en el sector privado, o los bajos as empresas privadas suelen pagar a sus empleados, se deba a los beneficios que han logrado los empleados públicos, mediante el ejercicio de negociar sus condiciones de trabajo a través del contrato colectivo. Todo mundo sabe que el azote del desempleo es la principal lacra que afea al sistema capitalista de producción, el único sistema de producción que esta sometido a los vaivenes del ciclo económico de auges

y depresión, con los desgarradores efectos de despidos colectivos, millones de gente viviendo del seguro de desempleo y los que no tienen ningún seguro, en la calle con la pérdida de su vivienda, de sus pertenencias y de su familia.

Los comentaristas periodísticos que escriben sobre esta noticia, igual que los republicanos y los del tea party, que lejos de poner el dedo en la llaga que causa este problema, que el déficit presupuestario no se debe a los gastos sociales que paga el Gobierno Estatal, sino a que los sectores de altos ingresos no contribuyen con mas participación a cubrir los gastos del estado, engañan al publico lector, y tratan de debilitar la unidad de la masa trabajadora, en beneficio de la ultra derecha política.

La soberbia del ataque del Gobernador a los Sindicatos evoca el desprecio de los dueños de plantaciones contra los esclavos, y la ausencia de derechos sindicales para los trabajadores de los estados del Centro Sur y Sur Este de los Estados Unidos, donde impera la ley del “Derecho al Trabajo”, nombre engañoso para definir que esos Estados rechazan el derecho a la sindicalización de los trabajadores de que gozan los demás Estados de la Unión Americana, de Europa, y del resto del continente Americano.

Luego del triunfo derechista de Noviembre pasado, es hora de que las fuerzas progresistas de la nación repitan la votación del 2008 y aseguren su triunfo en el 2012.