

Social Crisis in America: Should Public Workers Make Concessions?

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As workers all over the U.S. become inspired by the massive demonstrations in Wisconsin, a dangerous idea is being voiced by some working-class allies that could unravel it all. The threat lies in the following argument: to protect the bargaining rights of unions, state and city workers must be prepared to make concessions over wages, benefits, etc. This line of reasoning is not only false to the core, it's suicidal.

Take for example a recent New York Times article on the battle in Wisconsin:

"It is not yet clear whether Gov. Scott Walker of Wisconsin will succeed in his quest to strip public employee unions of most of their bargaining rights. But by simply pressing the issue, he has already won major concessions that would have been unthinkable just a month ago."

This is extraordinary: The Governor makes a radically anti-union threat, and some union leaders are ready to give him EVERYTHING, just not the kitchen sink.



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The article continues:

"Some of Wisconsin's major public sector unions, faced with what they see as a threat to their existence, have decided to accept concessions that they had been vigorously fighting...translating into a pay cut of around 7 percent...But Mr. Walker is not settling for that. He said that those concessions were "an interesting development, because a week ago they said that's not acceptable." (February 28, 2011).

So the anti-union Governor is making the unacceptable acceptable, merely by voicing a threat. If this precedent were established, what future do unions have? Especially when one

considers that state budget deficits are projected to continue for years.

Imagine the following scenario: A war is declared by a foreign army and the defending General responds by announcing to the invaders, "I will only fight one battle to preserve this particular parcel of land (bargaining rights), and will wave the white flag over all other territory (wages, benefits, etc.)."

Of course the foreign army would conclude "the enemy is already defeated!" And fight without mercy for total victory.

This is the situation in Wisconsin and other states. War has been declared on unions and some labor leaders are pretending that they can offer concessions to appease their attackers. Unfortunately, this strategy has failed for years, and is in fact why the right wing felt confident enough to officially declare war.

Every time unions agree to lower wages and benefits — as they have been doing for years — they weaken themselves internally, thus opening the way for further, deeper attacks. The right-wing attack on bargaining rights did not appear from nowhere; it was the result of years of concessionary bargaining, which inevitably leads to worker demoralization within the union. An army which concedes every battle will be composed of demoralized soldiers.

The union policy of concessionary bargaining is the policy of committing slow suicide, and after years of providing their executioners with nooses, some labor leaders act stunned when their hanging is announced. They believed that they could befriend the hangman, as long as they didn't create too much trouble by aggressive protesting or well-planned strikes.

But hangmen are hangmen, and they must be treated accordingly.

Labor unions must mobilize the entire community in every state to demand "No Concessions" for all public workers. The fight to save collective bargaining can only be won if workers believe that collective bargaining will save their wages and benefits; the two cannot be separated.

Contrary to what the mainstream media and politicians constantly tells us, the general public would support such a fight. A recent CBS News/New York Times poll found that "Those surveyed said they opposed, 56 percent to 37 percent, cutting the pay or benefits of public employees to reduce deficits." (March 1, 2011).

The battle in Wisconsin proves that private-sector workers do not hate their public-sector brothers and sisters, they passionately support them.

How can labor unions mobilize the general public towards a pro-worker solution to the state budget deficits? By exposing another media lie: that Americans are against ALL tax increases. In fact, the same pollsters discovered in 2009 that 74 percent of respondents "support higher taxes on the rich." (April 6, 2009).

Labor unions must place this demand at the head of their campaign to save collective bargaining rights and workers wages and benefits. Workers will be further encouraged to fight for their wages and benefits when they see that there is a solution to the budget crisis.

Rose Ann DeMoro of National Nurses United agrees:

“So it’s time for all of us to say it loud: No More Cuts in Public Sector Pay, Pensions, or Health Benefits; Balance Budgets By Closing Corporate Tax Loopholes, Restoring Fair Share Taxes on Corporations and Wealthy Individuals; Guarantee Retirement Security and Healthcare for All.”

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