

Refusing to Accept Concessions in Wisconsin: United we can win!

Growing Inequalities are undermining the U.S. Economy.

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(1) If the rich paid their fair share in taxes and if corporate loopholes were closed, the Wisconsin deficit would disappear overnight. The rich and the corporations have consistently lobbied to keep their taxes low. And by providing generous political contributions to both Democrats and Republicans, they have succeeded.

(2) During the past three decades inequalities in wealth have shot off the charts. They are now greater than ever before in U.S. history, because of a massive transfer of wealth from working people to the wealthy. This is in part because the rich and the corporations have succeeded in lowering their taxes and eliminating regulations on their businesses, in part because fewer workers are unionized, and in part because jobs have migrated overseas or have been wiped out by technology.

But these growing inequalities are undermining the U.S. economy. The corporations are sitting on record profits, but they are not hiring because there is little demand for their products. When the rich monopolize the vast majority of society's wealth, working people are left struggling to make ends meet and curtailing their purchases.

If the Wisconsin public workers make concessions, the inequalities in wealth will be increased, crippling the economy even more. And capitulation will invite more attacks. Public workers in other states will be told they are making too much. And once all the public sector workers suffer defeat, then the private sector workers will be targeted once again on the grounds that they make more than public sector workers. It will be a race to the bottom, and the inequalities in wealth will further accelerate because the rich will assure you that they can never have enough.

(3) We can wage a stronger battle in Wisconsin if we refuse to accept concessions.

At the outset of the struggle, many Wisconsin union officials signaled that they were prepared to accept concessions, which are being demanded in many states by Democrats and Republicans alike. But when Wisconsin public workers themselves were interviewed, one after another rejected the concessions. They know better than anyone that the concessions are not affordable, especially when they come on the heels of earlier concessions they felt compelled to accept.

Then the National Nurses Union came to the defense of the public workers by demanding no concessions. They organized a strategy meeting in Madison on this basis. And when Michael

Moore addressed the crowd on March 5 in Madison and implied there should be no concessions, the huge crowd roared its approval.

So the question of concessions has introduced a wedge between the union officials on the one hand and many of the public workers and their supporters on the other hand. Removing this wedge will result in a much stronger movement.

But even more, what public worker would want to throw him or herself entirely into a struggle for a 10 – 15 percent reduction in pay and benefits?

(4) The union officials would say in their defense that according to polls taken in Wisconsin before the battle began, the public supported concessions for Wisconsin workers. But a more recent New York Times/CBS poll reported that 56 percent of Americans now reject imposing cuts on public workers. Union officials must not make a fetish of polls, because public opinion can change rapidly. Once Wisconsin workers started putting up a fight, it changed everything. They caught the public's attention. And the Wisconsin firefighters' strong support of their public sector coworkers made an impact, because the firefighters were not facing the same threat of cuts.

Ordinary people get it immediately when presented with the facts about the growing inequalities in wealth, the ever-decreasing taxes on the rich and the corporations, and the increasingly difficult struggle of working people to maintain a dignified standard of living. Instead of capitulating to the polls, unions must launch their own offensive, stand up for what is right, educate the public by purchasing one-page ads in Wisconsin newspapers across the state, lay out all the facts clearly, and then let the people of Wisconsin make an informed decision. Union officials must not abandon public opinion to the corporate-owned media.

United we can win!

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