

US workers march against attacks

inbrief

SATURDAY 26 February saw the largest demonstrations yet in Madison, Wisconsin. This was the twelfth consecutive day of protest against Republican governor Scott Walker's bill to eliminate collective bargaining for public sector workers. Over 100,000 angry public and private sector workers, their families and supporters flooded the streets around the state capitol building.

Barry Roberts

The well below zero temperature did not cool the angry mood of many of the protesters. Many homemade placards showed an understanding that this was an attack on all unions and that behind the Republicans stood money from the super-rich and big corporations.

Walker's attack has provoked an enormous outburst of anger with an energetic mobilisation from below, often spontaneous, and inspired by the events in Egypt. While the bulk of the protests have been in Wisconsin there has been repeated solidarity action across the US. Last Saturday tens of thousands protested across the country in every state.

Walker's attack is correctly seen as the spearhead of a renewed Republican party offensive against the trade unions following its victories at last year's mid-term elections. Twelve states are debating introducing anti-union, so-called "Right to Work" laws, that already exist in 22 states. On top of that an avalanche



Angry workers outside the state capitol building. photo Brett Hoven

of cuts and attacks on working conditions has started across the US.

Saturday's demo showed a real determination to fight. Practically all sections of the labour movement were represented alongside families and students.

A contingent of uniformed prison guards kept chanting "Power! Union Power!" The newly formed radical National Nurses United distributed "Blame Wall Street. No concessions" placards to demonstrators. This was

the best of the slogans the national union leaders put forward. The national union campaign is entitled "We are One" and the main slogan pushed at Saturday's protest was "This is what democracy looks like".

The trade union leaders have no strategy beyond offering Walker concessions on pay and conditions in the hope of retaining bargaining rights. At the same time the union leaders emphasise the role of Democrats, especially 14 state sena-

tors who have prevented a quorate meeting of the State Senate by leaving Wisconsin. At the protest AFSCME, the federal state and local government workers' union, had a table which was only collecting signatures of support for the Democrats.

But while the Democratic state senators have, so far, stalled Walker they have not stopped the attacks. Nationally the Democrats, as a big business party, are implementing cuts. Obama, while opposing Walker's union plans, does not oppose cutbacks and attacks on conditions. Leaflets distributed by Socialist Alternative (CWI in the USA) called for a one-day general strike of public sector workers. This met an enthusiastic response.

The movement should prepare to shut down the whole state by uniting a public-sector general strike with student walkouts, and an appeal for all workers to join the strikers' demonstrations. This would show the power and raise the confidence of working people in Wisconsin and throughout the US.

The union leaders have repeatedly offered to accept Walker's demands for economic concessions. But Walker and Co are willing to wait out the demonstrations and restart their offensive. The unions must set a date for a one-day public sector general strike to step up the pressure and provide a clear direction. If the trade union leaders continue to stall, then it will be up to the rank and file to seize the initiative and take the struggle to a higher level.

Home Office

Civil service union PCS is balloting its members in the Home Office over job cuts and the sacking of two union reps on trumped-up charges.

Senior management first whinged about the ballot for action short of a strike, and then announced its intention to cut 776 staff from a pool of 1,453 at the Border Agency in Croydon. Jobs in Liverpool and Sheffield are also under threat.

The ballot is due to close on 23 March but the union is considering stepping up to a ballot for strike action if compulsory redundancies are threatened.

Renfrewshire victory

As we reported last week, a huge protest movement of parents, teachers and others from the local community has developed against the SNP-led council in Renfrewshire. The council had planned to cut 60 teachers' posts and replace them with lower-paid staff. After a 1,000-strong angry public meeting and a 97% 'yes' vote for strike action, the council has backed down.

This is a great example of industrial action linking up with a community campaign to fight the cuts. But campaigners and teachers will be alert to further attempts to cut education and other public services.

Train cleaners

Rail union RMT members working for Mitie were on a 24-hour strike on 25-26 February. The workers, based in Cardiff and Swansea, service First Great Western trains and are owed considerable sums of money by the company, which has also failed to make pension contributions. Mitie announced a 12% increase in profits recently but has been dragging its feet about settling this dispute with the low-paid staff, who were first forced to strike on 4 February.

Nottinghamshire

A strike took place of 3,000 members of Unison working for Notts county council on 24 February, the council's budget day. An 800-strong demonstration marched to county hall to oppose the council's spending plans. The council eventually approved a £87 million cut in next year's budget, and plans £150 million cut and 3,000 job losses in the next three years. The campaign against these attacks continues. Members meetings will be held to consider the next steps.

Pete Watson,
Notts Unison

BA staff ballot again

Unite is balloting 10,000 BA cabin crew members for the fourth time in two years. The dispute, over the company's threats to pay and working conditions, resulted in 22 days of strike action in 2010. BA has sacked 18 workers and disciplined 70 more for matters connected with the dispute. The ballot closes on 28 March.

Ford pensions ballot

About 11,000 Ford workers are to be balloted for action in defence of their pensions. The company wants to move to a scheme based on Consumer Price Index, rather than the higher Retail Price Index it uses at present. This not only affects current Ford workers but also 30,000 former workers who draw Ford pensions.

Unison witch-hunt Reinstate the Four!



Lobbying the Unison executive.

photo Paul Mattsson

FOUR SOCIALIST Party members, unjustly suspended from office by Unison, have won a major victory at an employment tribunal. On the eve of the Unison national executive last week, a public meeting was held.

The four explained how, after a three-year battle, they have been vindicated. Unison should never have banned them from office. The victory has definitely lifted the morale of Unison activists.

Those present were well aware that the Unison bureaucracy may

want to overturn this decision and therefore appeal against it.

Unison branches should pass the latest Defend the Four motion (below) calling for the bans to be lifted and send it to Unison general secretary Dave Prentis.

A noisy lobby of the Unison executive took place the following morning. Around 30 people demanded justice.

Those executive members who have supported the witch-hunt were left in no doubt that the campaign goes on till the bans are lifted.

THIS BRANCH welcomes the ruling of the outcome of the recent Employment Tribunal between Glenn Kelly, Onay Kasab, Brian Debus and Suzanne Muna and Unison.

The Judgement stated: "The unanimous judgement of the tribunal is that all the claimants were unjustifiably disciplined contrary to section 64 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidated) Act 1992."

This means Glenn Kelly, Suzanne Muna, Onay Kasab and Brian Debus should never have been disciplined let alone barred from holding office.

This follows a determined campaign by the four and their supporters which has lasted for over three years in which it was widely recognised that the persecution of the four was because they challenged the union leadership and had nothing to do with the disgraceful smear of racism.

We call on Unison to immediately lift the ban on the four from holding office and to end the "regional supervision" of the Bromley, Greenwich and TSA Unison branches.

Unison should desist from spending any more time and money trying to bar these members from holding office.

End the blacklist



Stopping the traffic at the Olympics site.

photo Suzanne Beishon

ALIVELY AND sizeable protest of trade unionists brought movement of vehicles onto the Olympic site in East London to a halt on 1 March. The protest was about the sacking of RMT member Frank Morris for boldly exposing the use of an illegal blacklist. Frank was dismissed by the company Daletech after he raised concerns about the sacking of a co-worker, who was sacked from the Olympics Media Centre after his name appeared on a blacklist of trade union members. Frank raised concerns about this illegal practice and was victimised, bullied and threatened with vio-

lence by site management before finally being sacked himself.

The protest is the first step in the campaign to get Frank reinstated and the National Shop Stewards Network stands fully behind this fight, as well as the struggle to end the blacklisting of trade union activists and end the anti-trade union laws.

For more information, visit the Blacklist Support Group website at www.hazards.org/blacklistblog and email blacklistsg@googlemail.com with messages of support

Greg Maughan

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