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Leroy Marney of Laborers Local 121 passes his hard hat at a “jobs rally” in Salem March 7 to collect money for entrenched public employees in Wisconsin who are fighting to save their collective bargaining rights. An estimated 750 union members, unemployed workers, and supporters of workers’ rights rallied at the front steps of the state Capitol for jobs and to show solidarity with workers in Wisconsin and elsewhere in the Midwest. In about five minutes, \$2,038.47 was raised.

Hundreds rally in Salem for jobs and solidarity

SALEM — Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber reaffirmed his commitment to workers’ rights and family-wage job creation at a March 7 “Jobs Rally” sponsored by the Oregon AFL-CIO.

“I want to start by making something perfectly clear: The state of Oregon will not go down the road Wisconsin has chosen,” Kitzhaber told a crowd of about 750 on the Capitol steps. “You have a governor who believes in the right of working people to organize and form a union. You have a governor who believes in the union movement and believes in collective bargaining.”

Union members from more than two dozen locals, unemployed workers, and supporters of workers’ rights, including various small business owners, took part in the noon rally calling for more jobs for Oregonians and to show solidarity with entrenched public employees in Wisconsin and elsewhere in the Midwest, where Republican lawmakers are trying to strip them of their collective bargaining rights. At one point during the rally, hats were passed to take a collection for the Wisconsin

workers’ struggle. In about five minutes, \$2,038.47 was raised.

Sean McGarvey, secretary-treasurer of the national AFL-CIO’s Building and Construction Trades Department, said organized labor refuses to roll back on such a fundamental right such as collective bargaining.

“Our brothers and sisters don’t ask for any more or any less than what’s provided to every other entity that does business with the state, the city, the county, the town; and that’s a document that spells out what’s expected and what’s given in exchange of the work that’s provided — and that’s a collective bargaining agreement,” he said.

“We’re also here about jobs, both in the private and public sectors,” said Tom Chamberlain, president of the Oregon AFL-CIO.

Chamberlain said good middle-class jobs are needed in the private sector to fuel the economy, and good middle-class jobs are vital in the public sector in order to teach children, protect citizens from harm, and to take care of the less fortunate.

“That’s what this is about — good, middle-class jobs that benefit both the private and public sectors. We need both,” he said.

Kitzhaber said he is working with both labor and business “to bring more industrial land into production and make sure the industrial land that we have is used to produce good, long-term, family wage jobs.”

He also outlined the need to fundamentally change Oregon’s health care delivery system to improve public health; improve the quality of care; and reduce the cost of care. To address those concerns, he said he will propose legislation to transform health care delivery through integration of services; incentives for prevention; and community-based management of chronic conditions.

“Health care can no longer be allowed to grow at double digit rates. If it does, it will continue to rob resources from workers wages, from school funding, and from our common social

Wisconsin governor’s union-busting tactics ignite national backlash; polling supports bargaining rights

The Wisconsin uprising continued into its fifth week as this issue went to press March 15. It began Feb. 11 when Wisconsin’s new Republican governor, Scott Walker, proposed a law to strip 175,000 Wisconsin public employees of virtually all meaningful collective bargaining rights, force them to pay more for health care and pensions, and hold annual elections in union workplaces to see if workers want to go nonunion.

As detailed in the March 4 issue of the Labor Press (available online at www.nwlaborpess.org), the reaction was spectacular: teacher sick-outs briefly shut school districts across Wisconsin; 14 state senate Democrats fled to Illinois to deny the Republican majority the quorum they needed to take action on the bill; thousands of union

supporters maintained a weeks-long 24-hour-vigil inside the state Capitol building in Madison; and protests outside the Capitol grew day by day, topping 70,000 Feb. 26.

Within two weeks, protests had spread to 66 cities and every state capitol in the nation. It wasn’t the specifics of Walker’s bill that inspired such broadly shared and deeply felt solidarity. It was the example of the Wisconsin community that rose up to oppose it. Their fightback returned collective bargaining to the collective consciousness for the first time in years.

By the end of February, 73 percent of Americans in a nationwide NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll said they’d seen, read, or heard news coverage about the protests; 77 percent said

public employees should have the same collective-bargaining rights as private sector workers; and 62 percent said it’s unacceptable to eliminate employees’ collective-bargaining rights as way to deal with state budget deficits, while just 33 percent said it’s acceptable. A separate NYT/CBS poll released a day later found the same thing: Americans oppose weakening public employee bargaining rights by a margin of nearly two to one (60 percent to 33 percent.)

But Walker has yet to back down.

His appointee in the state Department of Administration ordered the Capitol building closed to end the 24-hour-a-day occupation by protesters, and threatened to begin arresting them Feb. 26. But Capitol police gave them until Feb. 27 to leave. Local priests, min-

isters and rabbis joined them, prepared to be arrested, but no arrests were made, and protesters remained. Starting Feb. 28, Capitol police locked down the building, preventing new protesters from entering. AFSCME Council 24 went to court March 1 to stop the limits on public access to the state Capitol. On March 3, a Dane County Circuit Court judge ordered the Wisconsin Capitol cleared of protesters that evening and following evenings, but also ordered that the Capitol be open to the public during normal business hours.

If ever-growing protest demonstrations marked the uprising’s first stage, the second stage began March 2 when the Wisconsin Democratic Party announced a plan to recall Republican

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