

Raise a Glass

Toasting the working stiff in Wisconsin and at home

In most parts of the U.S., folks consider wine a luxury, even though many people in other parts of the world regard their wine (and/or beer) as essential to their meals. And it's hard to write about enjoying a luxury when so many of our fellow citizens are losing jobs and homes and hopes.

Even if prices have tumbled recently, people who can't afford food can hardly afford fine wines. Let's see: should we buy bread or this nice pinot noir? Not a serious question, right?

Of course, not everyone is suffering. Corporate profits are soaring, along with executive bonuses. Wall Street is thriving, and there, too, bonuses are even higher than before the financial collapse that bankers' absurd gambles produced across the world. Big Oil is wallowing in so much cash that oil billionaires like the Koch brothers can afford to spend part of a week's profits buying the House of Representatives and several state governments, which will, in turn, produce policies that quickly return the price of their purchase, and more.

Meanwhile, working people, instead of using their strength to reign in the anarchic



rich, turn on each other and fight for scraps. In Wisconsin, in a move so bold and so cynical as to be almost breathtaking, the Republican Party engineered a massive (\$107 million) tax cut for the wealthy, then declared a budget deficit (\$37 million) to be solved by busting unions of state workers, cutting salaries and benefits for teachers, firefighters, police, nurses, etc. And the chorus of Koch-addicts cheer them on.

Now, the Koch brothers have their eye on tiny Eugene. The Koch-junkies in their front organization, laughably called Americans for Prosperity, apparently plan a Koch-financed campaign against the proposal for a modest tax increase to fund our schools. The Koch Bros style themselves "Libertarians," and they don't like public education, or public anything. They apparently live on a planet of their own imagination. They can afford to.

I wonder what kind of wine the Kochs drink, and if they get a special buzz off knowing they can knock down a bottle of Chateau Petrus 2005 (\$5,000) at lunch, and the rest of us chumps can't.

Back on Earth, people lucky enough to

have jobs and modest means can still try to enjoy our lives, eat a little dinner, drink a little wine and raise our glasses in toast of the working stiff in Wisconsin and all across the world, including humble Bluegene.

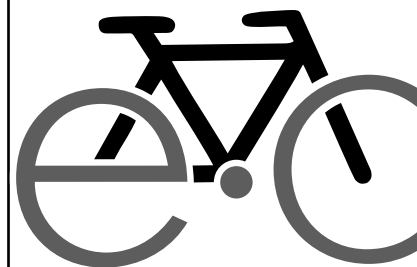
Affordable wines of good quality are appearing on market shelves from some unusual places, yielding remarkable taste experiences. Case in point: Portugal, long famous for their rich, red Ports, now markets other wines, especially from the Douro region, including some lovely whites. **Kopke 2008 Vinho Branco Douro** (\$10) charms with citrus/tropical fruit flavors and creamy texture, inviting matches with seafood or cheesy pastas.

Alandro White is a blend of grapes of various vintages, but it's fresh and lively, offering pretty aromas and flavors of citrus/pears and, at \$5.95, it's high value for a little dinner of delicate fish or crab.

Charles Smith produces a broad array of Washington wines, from everyday to elite. His slightly off-dry **Kungfu Girl 2009 Riesling** (\$12.50) has the floral/fruit/mineral qualities that make Riesling so appropriate to Asian cuisine.

I'm no prophet, but even I can see that we're in for some stiff storms. We should probably take our pleasures while we can. A little wine will help. **EW**

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