



Rep. Phil Barnhart says Wisconsin is waking up America

UNION POWER

Huge labor rally in Eugene calls for solidarity

WORDS & PHOTOS
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Collective bargaining is under attack in Wisconsin, Ohio, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, Indiana, Idaho, Florida, Michigan and elsewhere. Oregon would likely be on that growing list if our state had elected Chris Dudley for governor last year, or if just one more Republican had been elected to break the tie in the Oregon House of Representatives. What will happen in the next election? Unions and their members are worried, and are calling for public support.

A workers solidarity rally to “help create a Wisconsin-Oregon connection” drew a huge sign-waving crowd March 11 at the Free Speech Plaza downtown. It was one of the largest demonstrations seen in Eugene in recent years. The crowd, estimated at 400 to 500, filled the plaza to overflowing; but TV cameras and *The Register-Guard* were absent, their attention turned to the disaster in Japan and the possible tsunami on the Oregon Coast.

The boisterous labor rally also recognized the catastrophe in Japan and observed a moment of silence in honor of the victims. As if on queue, even the stream of honking cars going by went silent.

The long line-up of speakers was introduced by local AFSCME President Gary Gillespie, who works as a library aide at the Eugene Public Library.

“We’re union power,” said the first speaker, Ken Allen, AFSCME executive director of Council 75. “We need to think about one thing for our brothers and sisters in Wisconsin on Monday. Their state worker contract expires over this weekend.”

Allen described how Wisconsin state workers will now have no salary schedule, will pay 30 percent more for health care, will no longer have seniority rights, no grievance or arbitration rights, and no bidding for shift work or days off.

“I know there are city workers and county workers here, AFSCME members from all over state,” he said. “Are we going to allow that to happen in Oregon? Hell no. This is an attack on all of us.”

Jodi Jostmeyer, an SEIU member who works for the Department of Human Services, asked the crowd, “Why are these Wisconsin senators so invested in taking away our collective bargaining rights? Was it about the state’s deficits? Was it about our fat-cat pensions and health insurance? Was it about stripping

and stand up for fairness for all workers everywhere.”

Jostmeyer asked union members to join the picketing at US Bank locations in Salem and around Oregon at noon March 18. “US Bank is one of the thousands of private contracts funded by public dollars through the state of Oregon and it is one of the worst. They administer unemployment benefits and child support payments ... and charge excessive fees when unemployed workers and single parents withdraw their money.”



Karen Williams defends environmental workers

away our voice and our vote? Collective bargaining is fundamentally about giving workers the power to stand up to the bosses, the banks, the corporations, and the billionaires who are calling the shots. The only answer to organized greed is organized labor.”

“Here in Oregon,” she said, “we dodged this bite by only 19,000 votes for governor and 250 votes for Alan Bates in the Senate. It can happen here. We must stand united and continue our fight for fair contracts,

Deb Kidney, an AFSCME International training coordinator and former 911 operator, was in Madison, Wisc., Feb. 21, and said, “I saw people waking up to the reality of losing a right they had taken for granted for years. I saw people just like you, just like us: corrections officers, nurses, teachers, child care providers, field workers, auto workers, SEIU, AFSCME, and of course union members and community members who were standing together by the thousands.”

Kidney said the Eugene rally reverberates. “Every time the folks in Madison see things like this they are so happy and so heartened to know that folks all over the U.S. and all over the world are supporting them.” She urged the crowd to “Get out of your bubble. We all think the same, but we have to talk to our friends, our families, our neighbors, and have these conversations every day, because this could happen here. It’s about freedom.”

Standing up on top of the concrete wall podium to speak was Kevin Cronin of Lane Student Democrats Community Action Committee at LCC. He said his father worked 60 hours a week and he was not in a union. “Today, family wage jobs are under attack,” he said. “It’s time for us to take action, it’s time to say ‘Not in my city, not in my county, not in my state, not in my America.’”

Michael Carrigan, community organizer from CALC, said his organization is concerned about the “hundreds of billions of dollars that are going to the military, and the billions going to corporate tax breaks, because we want money coming back here to Lane County to pay for schools and social workers and to pay your salaries because you are the ones who are making this world a better place to live.”

Carrigan said the work that unions have done “have benefited all of us, whether we are union members or not. Our country is a better place because of you and because of unions. If we come together we can win. Say no to corporate greed and yes to justice.”

Bob Bussel, director of the Labor Education and Research Center at UO, said, “We have a simple question before us today: Do we want to have government of the people, by the people and for the people, or government of the rich, by the wealthy and for the powerful?”

“What they’ve been trying to do is divide us,” Bussel said. “They thought they