

Labor *Family* NEWS

PARTNERING WITH UNIONS TO PUT FAMILIES *first*

SPRING 2011

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Photo from Emergency Coalition to Save Child Care

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UNIONS WIN IT!

CWA Members Win Landmark Settlement

In a landmark victory, Verizon agreed to pay a settlement of over \$6 million to Communications Workers of America (CWA) members for violating family leave laws. This is the largest settlement in the history of the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH). A more than two-year long investigation produced allegations that from 2007-2010, Verizon failed to provide a timely response to leave requests, wrongfully denied leave and fired workers on protected leave. As part of the settlement, Verizon will revise its leave policies, train all managers and HR personnel on these policies, and submit regular updates to the DFEH on their compliance. This is a strong example of the critical

UNITED WE STAND

Wisconsin Energizes the Labor Movement

BY ELLEN BRAVO

When Scott Walker decided to try to wipe out collective bargaining for public employees, he didn't bank on the fierce and prolonged resistance he unleashed.

The uprising was powered by organized labor of all kinds – steelworkers marching with child care providers, postal workers side by side with nurses, teamsters and firefighters surrounded by teachers and home health aides.

But participants were by no means limited to labor. They included shop owners who knew how much their small business would be hurt by declining income among employees in their towns.

Parents and students came to denounce the attacks on the teachers and the horrific budget cuts for their schools.

At each rally at the State Capitol, several protesters carried signs that said, “Formerly Republican,” or “I voted for Scott Walker, but I didn't vote for this.”

During the weeks of marching in the snow, people saw the power in their numbers and in the knowledge they were gaining of who was calling the shots.

What they saw was a governor and his wealthy corporate backers trying to depict public employees as the “haves” and demanding they share the burdens inflicted upon other Wisconsin workers, at places like Harley-Davidson and Mercury Marine.

Mercury Marine of Fond du Lac had profits of \$1.1 billion from 2000-'07. During that time, it paid nothing in corporate income taxes to the state. The New York Times highlighted Harley as one of the companies finding “surging profits

in deeper cuts.” As the article pointed out, the benefits of those profits “are mostly going to shareholders instead of the broader economy.”

Wisconsin workers wouldn't buy the lies. They saw that workers at Harley and Mercury Marine - who were told how lucky they were to have a job at all - had to accept huge cuts not because their employers were in danger of going under but because highly paid execs wanted to keep more money for themselves.

They saw CEOs on Wall Street and at Wisconsin corporations sitting on record profits while cutting jobs here, shipping jobs overseas and paying gigantic bonuses to their executives and said – *they* should be the target of any budget-repair bill.

Not the woman who teaches severely disabled teens. Not the school librarian whose job was eliminated in the most recent Milwaukee Public Schools cutbacks. Not the technicians who test the blood of every newborn in the state and already are struggling after several rounds of wage freezes and furlough days.

Several factors made this uprising possible. The long tradition of progressive activism in Wisconsin. A gutsy group of graduate students. Terrific organizing by many, especially the teachers. An active Democratic caucus, including a progressive who successfully challenged a conservative Democratic state senator last November.

And a governor who badly over-reached.

But they forgot that those who put them in office can also take them out. The April 5 elections delivered resounding defeats for candidates associated with Walker and a near-defeat for his ally in the Supreme Court, considered a shoe-in just weeks earlier. Recall efforts against Republican senators are booming across the state.

As another sign from the protests read, “Scott Walker, you don't know me, but I will recall you.”

Ellen Bravo is Executive Director of Family Values @Work Consortium, a network of 15 state coalitions working for policies that value families. She lives in Wisconsin.



Farmers in the Wisconsin state capitol show their solidarity with public employees and other union workers. Photo by Barbara J. Miner Photos

UNIONS WIN IT!

FROM PAGE 1

role unions play not only in obtaining rights for workers, but also in making sure these rights are respected. Ellen West, Area Director of CWA, District 9 in Southern California says, "It is incumbent upon unions to help educate union leadership on the laws and contractual rights that have been bargained to help members balance work and family life. So many workers don't realize that there are protections against job loss." The union played a key role in getting information to members whose rights were violated and in holding Verizon accountable.

For more information about the settlement, visit www.district9.cwa-union.org

Have you bargained for flex time? Started an on-site child care? Labor Family News wants your story! Share your successes at info@working-families.org



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INSIDE STORY

NO CHILD CARE – NO WORK!

Deepening the Economic Crisis for Working Families

BY JENYA CASSIDY

Parents need to work and children need to learn. But the recession coupled with drastic cuts to child care budgets across the country could put an end to both these endeavors for many low income families. According to economists and early education advocates, the consequences of these cuts will be felt for generations to come.

NATIONAL CUTS TO CHILD CARE

In spite of federal stimulus money, cities and states are slashing child care budgets and leaving the families who depend on subsidies reeling. In New York City, 17,000 child care slots are on the chopping block; in California, parents who came off welfare to work are facing the loss of their child care; and in Louisiana, a model preschool program serving low income children is getting cut. These cuts have a devastating effect on the children who have to leave a quality preschool program their parents couldn't otherwise afford.

Child care advocates, parents and unions have been active in the national movement to extend preschool to all 3 and 4 year olds and to improve working conditions and teaching standards. There has been great momentum around building model and pilot publicly-funded preschool programs across the country. Now with the recession and budget cuts, advocates fear that this will be lost. Steve Burnett of the National Institute for Early Education Research – an early education think

tank – says that with more families facing economic hardship, publicly-supported preschool is more important than ever. The cuts hurt the children and have an immediate impact on the families' economic well-being as the majority of parents rely on child care to work.

WORKING FAMILIES IN A BIND

According to the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), 57 percent of parents depend on their child care arrangements to find and maintain employment. For low income families, this number is higher. The national child care cuts affect many families who went off welfare to work and can't afford child care without subsidies. As Nasha Norton, a working mother from East New York whose daughter is losing her child care spot said, "For years, the city has encouraged people to work. But without my child care, how am I supposed to work?"

The recession has been especially hard on families with young children. In a recent report by NACCRRA, a majority of child care consumers say they have experienced job losses and pay cuts in the last year and have sometimes been forced to leave or compromise on the quality of their child care.

The cuts to child care funding put even more families in this bind. Some parents have to leave a job that doesn't pay enough to meet child care expenses. Others leave children with neighbors,

Unions Fight for Child Care

Unions are on the front lines in the national fight against child care cuts:

- In New York, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) brings family child care providers and teachers together to protest cuts in child care and education – pointing to the link between the two.
- In California, unions including AFSCME, California Federation of Teachers (CFT) and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) have joined parents in protesting child care cuts.
- In Illinois, SEIU brings child care providers and health care providers together to fight for a fair budget for all families.



Preschoolers participate in "Save Our Child Care" rally in New York. 17,000 child care slots were threatened in the city budget. Photo from Emergency Coalition to Save Child Care

friends or unemployed family members. "If my funding is cut, that means my oldest will be taking care of my youngest. Not ideal," Says Gina Jackson a California single parent of two who has relied on subsidies to keep both children in child care while she works. "It's even worse for parents of really young children, a mother I know has her three year old go from neighbor to neighbor until she gets home from work. She needs her job – what else can she do?"

Child care cuts also mean less jobs for child care providers and teachers. The unions are involved in Save Our Child Care - the New York Coalition fighting against child care cuts. The unions are pushing for child care slots and quality jobs for teachers in a city already ravaged by unemployment. "Our City already has high unemployment," said Raglan George, Executive



Photo by Maria Luz Torre

“This is not a good story for anyone right now. We are looking at the dismantling of America’s child care system, eroding the foundation of our education system and potentially foreclosing on our economic future. unions, providers and parents need to meet lawmakers in their districts so they can see the people who are affected.”

Joe Wilson, Assistant Director of Field Services, AFSCME, Western Regional Office

Director of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) District Council 1707. “Why would the Mayor want to cut 17,000 child care slots – leaving parents at risk of losing their jobs because they cannot find a safe place for their child while they are at work and leaving child care providers at risk of having to lay off the people who work for them?”

QUALITY EDUCATION IS KEY

When families lose child care funding, children often lose their chance to get high quality early education – now seen as key to success in kindergarten and beyond. Kim Sandy, a mother of four in New York says that for her, the hardest part about losing her son’s child care slot is her fear that he won’t keep learning at the same rate. “He loves his school – he is learning so much. He comes home everyday excited to tell me what he learned. He is even becoming bilingual – English and Spanish.”

According to Catherine Atkin, President of Preschool California, high-quality early education helps close the achievement gap and should be available to all children before starting kindergarten. “We are deeply dismayed to see the reductions to early learning programs in our state budget. California’s underfunded public preschool programs currently serve less than half of all eligible 3 and 4 year olds, and these cuts would reduce access even further.”

In Jefferson Parish, Louisiana LA4 is a state-funded preschool program that serves more than 2,300 3-5 year olds. Its program includes basic science and math, reading and language development, creative arts and writing. It serves as a model for other preschools yet, like much of the country, the program is threatened with cuts. Most of the families cut out of the program would not be able to afford something similar on their own. Donna Sneeringer, Executive Director for Children Now is disturbed by the growing inequities in early education caused by these budget cuts. “I fear that we are moving toward a system of ‘haves and have-nots’ when it comes to child care,” she said. “Only those who can pay will have quality child care slots and there will be less of those to choose from.”

Stephanie Gendell, Associate Executive Director of Save Our Child Care in New York says the hardest thing is the feeling of going backward now when so many low income children need quality care. “It’s frustrating to just keep fighting to keep what we have when we need so much more,” she says. When asked about the Coalition’s vision of the future she says, “We want every child who qualifies to get quality child care – there should be no waiting lists and no families going without the benefits of early education.”

NEWSWORTHY

■ **THE BEST PLACE IN THE WORLD TO BE A MOM IS NORWAY**, according to a new study measuring the well-being of mothers and their babies. In Norway maternal and child mortality rates are low, women’s life expectancy and years in school are high, and the average maternity leave is about one year. The study, Save the Children’s twelfth annual Mothers’ Index – *The 2011 Mothers’ Index* – put the US as #31 out of 164 countries and says it could do better the issue of parental leave and mother and infant mortality. For more information go to www.savethechildren.org.

■ **THE CANADIAN PROVINCE OF QUEBEC LAUNCHED** a new program last month to grant an official government seal of approval to family-friendly employers. This program encourages telework, flexible work schedules, time off for family needs and on-site child care. Employers can earn points toward achieving four progressive levels of recognition for family-friendly programs, and display an official government logo for each level they achieve. WSJ, *The Juggle*, May 9, 2011

UNBELIEVABLE

■ **COLBY LEWIS, TEXAS RANGERS STARTING PITCHER**, was the first professional baseball player to take parental leave under Major League Baseball’s new paternity leave policy. The policy provides up to 72 hours of leave to players to attend the birth of a child. Some fans were angry at Lewis for skipping his turn in the rotation to attend his daughter’s birth, publicly accusing him of ‘caring more about being a parent than being a starting pitcher.’

GREAT RESOURCES

■ **POOR, PREGNANT AND FIRED**, a new report by UC Hastings’ Center for Work Life Law details the shocking discrimination low wage workers can face at work when they are expecting a new child or have caregiving responsibilities. For more information, or to download the full report, go to www.uchastings.edu



Labor Leaders Discuss Family-Friendly Economy

Union leaders led a lively discussion on labor and work family rights at a recent event co-sponsored by the Labor Project and the Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor at Georgetown University. Mary Kay Henry, President of SEIU, Veda Shook, President of the Association of Flight Attendants – CWA, Liz Shuler, Secretary- Treasurer of the AFL-CIO and Larry Hanley, President of Amalgamated Transit Union spoke about organizing new members and how work family issues fit into the union agenda.

See an excerpt at www.working-families.org

Labor Project for Working Families

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NETSYNOTE

When Governor Walker limited collective bargaining for public employees in Wisconsin to wages only, he cut off workers' ability to bargain over the quality of life issues that the Labor Project fights for. We know that unions set the bar for all working people. Unions won the right to the eight hour day, the weekend and overtime rules for all workers. Taking away the right to bargain on issues like mandatory overtime, flexible work hours and paid sick days impacts every worker in this country. It hurts our ability to care for ourselves and our families and sets the bar at a new low.

Union-led coalitions are fighting to extend benefits like paid sick days to all workers. But in Wisconsin, the legislature passed a state bill that will ban a Milwaukee law mandating paid sick days for all workers. That law was passed by the citizens of Milwaukee in 2008 and won by over 70% of the vote. Now family advocates and local unions are joining together to fight the ban.

Unions fight for public policies for all workers, not just their own members. It is no secret that these attacks seek to curtail the political power of unions – power that is used to fight for raising the minimum wage, family leave, overtime laws, paid sick days and more.

The stakes are high for all workers. We need to set the bar higher, not lower, to reflect what today's working families need. A good job means the right to collectively bargain, good wages, pensions and a healthy and safe workplace. But it also means having a voice and workplace standards so you don't have to choose between a paycheck and your family. To win healthy family-friendly workplaces, we need a strong labor movement to fight for all workers.



Netty Friedman

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