
WISCONSIN CRISIS

Brief

THE BASICS

Governor Scott Walker wants to eliminate the state's \$3.6 billion budget deficit on the backs of the public service. He wants to do this by stripping public-sector unions of their collective bargaining rights. If passed, Walker's bill would make it illegal for employees to negotiate working conditions, benefits, or job protection.

The only thing the union would be allowed to discuss is wages, and even that would be so restricted that it wouldn't really be bargaining. Any wage increases beyond the consumer price index would have to be approved in a referendum.

He plans to arbitrarily cut the employer's pension and health benefit contributions, effectively cutting employee pay by up to 8% right off the top.

WHAT THE WISCONSIN CRISIS MEANS TO US

1. As AUPE members:

- This cancer is already spreading to other states and there are calls for similar attacks on the public service here in Canada. Even tougher anti-union legislation is being considered in Ohio, while other states are toying with similar attacks.

Meanwhile, the smear campaign against the public service in Canada is growing shriller. Last month the Frontier Centre for Public Policy released a "backgrounder" that said public sector wages have exploded in recent years, while the private sector has suffered. This is nonsense. Stats Can figures show that in the past five years public sector wage increases are on par with technical services and professions in the private sector, and well behind the mining and energy sector. That hasn't stopped the media from using the backgrounder to attack public sector pay. Now, some members of the Canadian media are calling union bashers like Walker "heroes" and labeling protesters "reactionaries." With politicians in Alberta so bent on privatizing public services, it's only a matter of time before someone tries to eliminate the provincial deficit by gutting our contracts.

2. As Albertans:

- Governor Walker wants to eviscerate the unions so that he can make draconian budget cuts with virtually no organized opposition. Even before tabling his budget, Walker said he planned to cut \$900 million from education. He plans to slash publicly-funded health care to the poor, cut funding for education and sell off public assets. His ultimate goal is to tear apart his state's social safety net. If he's successful, you can bet that the Alberta government will want to copy him.

This is why we must encourage our members to support the struggle in Wisconsin, which has become ground zero in the war on public sector unions.

WISCONSIN CRISIS

Timeline

FEB. 11

After two months of warning that drastic measures were needed to tackle Wisconsin's \$3.6 billion deficit over the next two years, Gov. Scott Walker unveils a "budget repair bill" that will destroy unionized public employees' bargaining rights. Under the plan, all collective bargaining for state and local employees would be restricted to pay increases only, and those would be limited to the changes in consumer price index. Any pay increases over and above that would require the approval of voters in a referendum. It will be illegal for unions to negotiate things like working conditions, benefits and job protection. Walker says this will give him more flexibility to slash the state budget, to be unveiled March 1.

FEB. 13

About 150 protestors demonstrate outside the state capitol in Madison while another 100 picket the governor's mansion.

FEB. 14

Students protest outside Walker's office while leaders of various public sector unions meet to plan large-scale mobilization.

FEB. 15

Thousands demonstrate inside and outside the capitol while hundreds more sign up to speak to the legislature's joint finance committee, which is holding hearings on the bill. The meeting goes into the night and some demonstrators set up camp outside. Some sleep inside the building. Teachers begin calling in sick.

FEB. 16

The crowd outside the capitol swells to 20,000. The Wisconsin Education Association Council calls on its 98,000 members to attend rallies. Schools in Madison are forced to close because so many teachers refuse to go to work by calling in sick.

FEB. 17

At least 15 school districts across the state close for the day. Walker's budget bill must be passed by both houses of the state legislature – the assembly and the state senate – both of which are controlled by Republican majorities. A minimum number of members of each house must be present to hold a vote (quorum). Fourteen Democratic state senators leave Wisconsin in order to deny the senate a quorum and stall the vote. Walker considers sending police to find them and bring them back.

FEB. 18

Crowds outside the capitol swell to about 40,000. National media and union leaders begin showing up.

FEB. 21

The South Central Federation of Labour, which represents 97 public and private sector unions in Wisconsin, calls for a general strike across Wisconsin.

FEB. 22

Teachers return to school. The capitol's assembly begins to debate the bill. Democratic members propose 100 amendments to the bill.

FEB. 24

Campers inside the capitol are moved out at night while the assembly continues to debate the bill.

FEB. 25

At 1 a.m. Republicans in the assembly call a vote and the bill passes. It advances to the senate, but because there's no quorum, it's still waiting to be passed there.

FEB. 26

Tens of thousands protest the looming budget outside the capital. Some estimates say as many as 100,000 demonstrated. Union leaders wait for Walker to unveil his budget before planning the next phase of their campaign.

MAR. 1

Walker's 2011-13 budget calls for \$4.2 billion in cuts over two years, 6.7% of the total budget. This includes \$1.5 billion from schools and local governments, 10% from all state departments, and shutting down the commerce department entirely. Facilities like juvenile correctional institutions will be closed. The University of Wisconsin faces a \$250 million cut.

Walker also proposes more tax breaks for business.

Local governments and school boards will not be allowed to raise property taxes to make up for the losses, but Walker says they can make up much of the difference with the cuts he's proposing to public employees' health and pension plans.

On the day that Walker unveiled his budget, polls show that the general public in Wisconsin supports the protesters. 42% oppose Walker's plans while 31% support it, according to the Pew Research Centre. Another poll says 57% of the public support public employees' right to full collective bargaining, while another survey showed an even split on whether Walker should be recalled, 48% for and 48% against.