



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Wisconsin labor unions and allies campaign against Governor Walker's "Budget Repair Bill", 2011

14 February

2011

to: 11 March

2011

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: *Madison, Wisconsin*

Location Description: *Most action took place at the state capitol building*

Goals:

1. To prevent the "Wisconsin Budget Repair" Legislation, or Senate Bill 11, proposed by Republican Governor Scott Walker, from being signed into law. This bill would deny the right of non-public safety employees to collectively bargain on all issues except base wages.

2. To prevent Republican legislators from circumventing the Constitution to pass legislation without time for proper public review and/or debate on the issue. In addition to the assault on their right to bargain, protestors saw this as an additional violation on their rights as Americans.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 035. Humorous skits and pranks
- 038. Marches

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 104. Professional strike
- 144. Stalling and obstruction
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

- 104. Professional strike
- 144. Stalling and obstruction
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 4th segment:

- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 104. Professional strike
- 144. Stalling and obstruction
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 5th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 6th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 162. Sit-in

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Democracy

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- and Students
- teachers
- unions

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Wisconsin Teachers Union

Partners:

Democrat Senate Members

External allies:

MSNBC Anchor - Ed Shultz

MoveOn.org

Ohio Union members

US President Barack Obama

Involvement of social elites:

Filmmaker Michael Moore

Musician Tom Morello

Singer Peter Yarrow

Actor Bradley Whitford

Actress Susan Sarandon

Actor Tony Shalhoub

US President Barack Obama

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Democrat Senate Members
- MSNBC Anchor - Ed Shultz (exit)

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

- Police Union

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

- Celebrities

Segment Length: *Approximately 4 days*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker and State Republican Officials

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

None Known

Campaigner violence:

Police did find .22 caliber cartridge shells at the capitol - no shots fired

Repressive Violence:

None Known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The ultimate goals were not achieved. The campaign brought the attention of the issue into the national debate, and certainly gave other conservative officials in other states reason for pause before they implemented the same measures that the Walker administration did.

On Valentine's Day 2011 Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker proposed his Budget Repair Bill. This bill would eliminate the ability for several labor unions to collectively bargain with the state.

The bill would also limit groups allowed to bargain to be able to negotiate only base wages for their members. Additionally, this bill forced state employees to increase the percentage they would pay for health insurance from 6% to 12%, and retirement pension from less than 1% to 5.8%.

This bill was especially troubling for many because Wisconsin was the first state to allow collective bargaining for public employees in 1959. The passing of this bill would not only set a precedent, but an extremely powerful one because of the strong ties collective bargaining had within Wisconsin's history.

On February 14, 2011, students and staff from the University of Wisconsin-Madison delivered "Valentine's Day" cards to Governor Scott Walker at the Capitol. Participants were concerned that Governor Walker's budget repair bill would not only eliminate the professors' ability to collectively bargain on most issues, but that it forced them to contribute a higher percentage of wages towards insurance and retirement benefits. The big concern with this requirement is that it would be much harder to recruit qualified professors into the state if these requirements were to go forward. The University of Wisconsin-Madison reportedly already had lower wages than most of its competition and this bill would make it even harder than it already was to recruit high quality professors, and even harder to retain good talent.

The next day at least 10,000 people gathered outside the capital to protest the bill. That same day Republican legislators acquiesced on the issue of zero public debate and allowed people inside the capitol building to voice their opinion about the budget repair bill. This quorum went on until the late hours of the evening, lasting well after midnight. At the same time, protesters flooded the inside of the capitol building and proceeded to beat on drums and protest, while crowds continued to gather outside. The numbers outside the capitol waned throughout the day, but by the next day they returned to about 30,000 in number.

The next day, February 17, 14 Democrat state senators left the state, leaving the remaining 19 Republican senators unable to vote on the bill, as Wisconsin law requires the presence of at least 20 senators to vote on budget legislation. These 14 senate Democrats stayed in an undisclosed location somewhere in the state of Illinois while the Republicans used several tactics to draw them back to the state - as well as developing strategies to pass the legislation regardless of the Democratic absence.

At the same time, 25,000 people gathered to protest outside the capitol, and according to USA Today, the protests even began to spread into the senate chambers. The same day, protests also broke out in Columbus, Ohio where 3,800 people came to protest in support of their "brothers and sisters" in Wisconsin, and to let their Governor, who was allied with Gov. Walker of Wisconsin, know that they would not stand for similar legislation in Ohio.

The four days from February 17-20 marked the largest days of the protests since the beginning of the campaign. An estimated 55,000 to 70,000 people acted, of whom a large contingent gathered outside the capitol, with approximately 5,000 - 8,000 people inside the capitol building.

The Madison campaign gained national attention and was reported on by all major news networks. On the nights of February 17th & 18th MSNBC anchor Ed Schultz reported live from the Wisconsin capitol with thousands of protesters as his backdrop.

By the night of the 20th protesters had established a full occupation of the capitol with designated information areas, sleeping areas, and even food centers with food that was donated or supplied by local businesses, such as Ian's Pizza, which collected donations from all 50 states and from as far away as Egypt.

On February 25th rumors spread that the capitol would be closed down and protesters would be forced to move outside the premises. The rumors heightened the movement's energy and Jim Palmer, executive director of the Wisconsin Professional Police Association, came out in support of protesters and urged off-duty officers to even join protesters and sleep at the capitol in an attempt to keep it open to protesters. Later that day authorities announced that in fact the capitol would remain open, alleviating fears that officials were trying to clamp down on the protest.

On the next day 70,000 - 100,000 swelled the spaces inside and around the capitol. On that same day liberal organization MoveOn.org organized protests in 66 different cities including all 50 state capitals.

On March 3, after two weeks of occupying the capitol building, overnight protesters were forced to leave the premises and were no longer to spend the night inside the building. However, the judge also ordered that "improved access to the building has to be in place by Monday morning." Security seemed to be an issue, although this was on the agenda of authorities since the beginning of the occupation. What they did not anticipate was a judge ordered decision to re-open the building for normal operating conditions.

On March 11, 2012, after 26 days of continual protest, Gov. Scott Walker signed the bill into law.

Protesters had gathered en masse, waged sit ins, and earned the support of celebrity allies such as filmmaker Michael Moore, Rage Against the Machine guitarist/activist Tom Morello, and others. While the protesters did not achieve their immediate goals, they laid the groundwork for later recall elections that would remove some legislators from office, force the governor to fight once again to remain governor via a recall election, and rouse opinion nationally against what was revealed to be a multi-state attack on the labor movement and its social advocacy.

Research Notes

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Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Justin Woodruff, 11/04/2012

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