A
fter ignoring a series of historic demonstrations over the last month numbering at times up to 250,000 people, Wisconsin governor Scott Walker on March 11 signed a bill illegally passed through the state’s legislature that deprives Wisconsin public employees of their collective bargaining rights. “Ordinary working Americans who serve as public employees didn’t cause the economic problems that the nation is facing, but they are being scapegoated by right-wing politicians looking to make headway where they now have control,” noted UPTE’s president Jelger Kalmin. “Expect this fight to arrive in California in a big way soon. We’ll be ready.”

Though Walker justified Wisconsin’s bill on budgetary grounds, the bill has next to nothing to do with balancing the budget and a lot to do with busting unions. Wisconsin’s public sector unions had already negotiated steep contributions to help the state with its financial problems.

Wisconsin’s bill not only strips unions of the ability to bargain over sick leave, benefits, and other working conditions. It requires that any proposed increases greater than the CPI would need to be submitted to a public referendum. It eliminates fair-share dues provisions and automatic dues deductions, and it requires unions to submit every year to a decertification vote.

Nationwide labor fightback

A huge movement to recall Wisconsin’s Republican legislators has sprung up in response and as other Republican-led state governments introduce vicious budget-cutting legislation aimed at public workers’ pay, benefits and bargaining rights, people are taking a page from Wisconsin’s playbook and showing up in numbers to protest.

Around California, UPTE members were among those demonstrating their solidarity with Wisconsin’s workers in rallies. “Turning back the clock 50 years is not acceptable,” said UPTE’s Nino Maidaitis, who joined some 5,000 protesters in San Francisco. “People have fought and died for the right to bargain collectively, and it’s the foundation of workplace democracy.”

In Florida, author Stephen King spoke at a Sarasota “Wake Up Florida” rally and connected Gov. Rick Scott’s assault to those in other states. In Iowa on March 7, teachers and other public and private workers filled the capitol building to protest at a public hearing on ending collective bargaining. In Ohio, union members have been regularly showing up in large numbers to surround the capitol in Columbus to protest a bill that would gut collective bargaining rights.

Workers in Michigan have been turning out at their state house in Lansing to protest a similar Republican-backed bill. The Wisconsin AFL-CIO’s website <www.wisaflcio.org> has details on rallies happening in Madison and elsewhere.

It does appear that when workers stand up for themselves, people listen. A recent Bloomberg poll shows a large majority of Americans favor public employees favorably, and an NBC/Wall Street Journal poll found that 77% favor the right of public employees to bargain collectively.

**APRIL 4 – BE THERE!**

On April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, where he had gone to stand with sanitation workers demanding their dream: the right to bargain collectively for a voice at work and a better life. The workers were trying to form a union with AFSCME.

This April 4, join us in solidarity with working people in Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana and dozens of other states where well-funded, corporate politicians are trying to take away the rights Dr. King gave his life for, such as the freedom to bargain, to vote and justice for all workers.

It’s a day to show movement. A day to be creative, but clear: We are one. Find your local events at <www.we-r-1.org>
CWA scholarships – apply now!

April 30 is the deadline to apply for CWA’s Joe Beirne college scholarships. Fifteen partial college scholarships of up to $3,000 each are available. The winners also will receive second-year scholarships for the same amount, contingent upon satisfactory academic achievement.

CWA members and their families, including grandchildren, are eligible for the scholarships. Apply online at <www.cwa-union.org/pages/beirne>. Applications will be accepted until April 30, 2011. The winners will be chosen by lottery from those submitting the required essay.

In addition, New York’s Empire State College is accepting applications until May 15 for CWA’s Morton Bahr Online Learning Scholarships for the 2011-12 academic year.

The scholarship allows students to attend college through Empire State’s Center for Distance Learning. Applications are at <www.esc.edu/bahr>.

14,000 administrative professionals organizing with UPTE

UPTE members in the 14,000-strong administrative professionals (AP) unit are engaged in an organizing campaign to designate UPTE as their exclusive representative. Job titles in the AP unit include administrative analysts, student affairs officers, programmer/analysts, publications coordinators, senior editors and writers, as well as many other titles.

While many APs have voluntarily joined UPTE and participate in the union, they do not yet have a union contract to enable them to bargain collectively for wages, benefits and working conditions.

APs can sign a “commitment card” supporting the union at <www.upte.org/990>.

We asked Mark Pabst (pictured above), who works as a clinical research coordinator (Analyst II) at UCSF, about some of the issues facing APs and the union campaign.

What are the biggest issues facing administrative professionals?

I think the biggest issue facing APs is similar to the issue that is facing the university as a whole. The University of California is undoubtedly being transformed as it tries to address the recent changes in its funding and its mission.

For APs, I think many of us recognize that the changes on a university-wide level translate into changes in our immediate work environments. We see changes being made to our pension, changes being made to the cost of our benefits, and changes being made to the structure of our work through programs like Operational Excellence [a UC Berkeley program to reorganize units - ed.].

Like the university, we know we have to change to remain successful, but many of us recognize that we also need a voice in the process so we can help guide the changes that are being made.

Do you have an opinion about handling the shortfall of state funding?

These are difficult times for many people and I respect that the university needs to be prepared to continue carrying out its mission with fewer state resources. However, I think the university is not making a genuine effort to listen to its students and employees when it decides how to best handle the funding challenges. Although all parts of the university are facing cutbacks, I think the university is ignoring certain elements of the UC community when it decides how to allocate precious resources.

How would UC administrative professionals benefit from union representation?

Union representation would give APs both a voice and a seat at the table when the university sets its priorities and disperses resources. Individually APs are not considered important enough to merit a place in this process, but collectively we make up such an important element of the university that we cannot simply be ignored.

I think union representation means that UC can no longer take us and our work for granted when it comes to making decisions that affect our professional futures.

HX members vote to extend contract

UPTE members of the HX unit (health care professionals) have voted to keep their current contract for now. A majority of 57% voted in favor of extending the HX contract until December 31, 2011.

“People are anxious – that’s what this vote means,” said Wendi Felson, UPTE’s chief negotiator for the HX unit. “There’s a lot of uncertainty about the state budget, UC’s current financial situation, and our pension funds. It’s also clear that the current right-wing campaign to vilify public workers does not create an auspicious climate for bargaining.” But, she added, “We get to vote. It’s up to us. That’s what collective bargaining is all about and why it is such a threat to the wealthy and powerful.”

The agreement means that all HX employees will receive a 1% range adjustment on May 1, 2011, and a lump sum payment equivalent to 1% of the average HX salary over the five-month period from December 1, 2010 thru April 30, 2011 for eligible employees. This summer, the 2% Defined Contribution Plan amount employees have been paying will end. July 1 they will begin contributions of 1.5% to the UC Retirement Program.

“Everyone on the step system will move up one step of approximately 2% Those on experience-based steps will move up according to those structures, and those ‘topped out’ will receive a lump sum payment of approximately 2%,” said Felson.

New contract negotiations for the unit begin in the fall.

UPTE testifies at the National Academy of Sciences

UPTE-sponsored legislation has mandated a National Academy of Sciences study of the effects of privatization on the Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore National Labs’ science and national security missions.

Both labs are owned by the Department of Energy, but in 2006, after years of being run solely by UC, their management was handed over to private consortiums that include Bechtel and several other companies.

UPTE activist Jeff Colvin gave the opening testimony for the study. He presented evidence that the privatization has dramatically escalated management fees and executive compensation, harming scientific productivity as well as the transparency that is critical to the labs’ mission.

“Our goal is to bring these Department of Energy labs formally back under UC’s purview, instead of having them run by the private corporations in which UC has a 50% share,” said Colvin. “This ‘deprivatization’ will benefit UPTE’s members at the labs, and it is also critical to the labs’ future success and survival.”

UPTE’s administrative professionals organizing committee and their supporters gather to strategize about gaining the right to collective bargaining. Back row: Lisa Kernish (UCB), Elizabeth Wilks (UCSB), Laurel Lucia (UCB), Jesse Greenman (UCB), Liz Phillips (UCD), Brett Robertson (UCSD), Erin Castro (UCLA).

Front row: David Sookne (UCLA), Mark Pabst (UCSF), Mateo Rutherford (UCSF), Jelger Kalmijn (UCSD), Susan Orlofsky (UCSD).
UCSF and beyond.
A two-for-one victory

A recent victory at UCSF “shows how even the most nitpicky safety complaint can turn out to be quite important,” states UPTE-CWA 9119 Local 7 Chief Steward Nino Maida. The victory took more than four years, but confirms a fundamental rule. And we can use it to win much larger victories.

One day, while visiting a major research campus building at UCSF, Maida noticed that the elevator’s license had expired more than four years earlier. After filing a safety grievance, a Request For Information (RFI), and a hazard report with the Office of Environment, Health & Safety (EH&S), UPTE and Human Resources (HR) went back and forth about the union’s interest in getting a list of elevators in buildings where UC employees work. It took a year to receive a carelessly prepared, incomplete list of elevators. Maida, angered by this indifference, became more persistent.

UPTE began to identify many more buildings whose elevators hadn’t been inspected in years. When UPTE filed RFIs, HR questioned the union’s legal standing to ask about safety for nonexclusively represented members. And HR frequently employers “to provide and maintain a safe and healthful workplace for employees.” It doesn’t matter who owns the buildings; UC is still responsible for the health and safety of all of its employees. UC can contact building managers to find out the status of elevator licenses, and if licenses have expired it can force owners to schedule necessary inspections and maintenance. In fact, it is legally responsible for doing so.

After UPTE filed a number of RFIs and three different grievances over 4-5 years, and waited for resolution of departmental turf battles at different SF campus locations, UCSF finally developed lists of all elevators, dates they were last inspected and maintained, and license expiration dates in all buildings where UC employees work, regardless of ownership, so that UC could readily keep track of elevator safety.

More importantly, UPTE finally got no argument from UCSF about its responsibility for the health and safety of its employees.

This is the larger issue that needs to be pressed throughout the university in developing a safety culture. UC has a long way to go. The next issue will focus on UC employees who are required to work alone under hazardous conditions, with little or no training, sometimes overseas. - Joe Lichterman, UPTE’s Systemwide Health & Safety Director

RX/TX unit bargains over health care costs

UPTE’s research and tech (RX/ TX) workers are negotiating over pensions and the health care premium increases UC is trying to impose on those who need to remain on Health Net or Blue Cross Anthems.

“As plan rates increase, our members had very little time to consider alternatives to these two plans,” said Jelger Kalmijn, “not to mention the potential medical implications of switching plans such as losing coverage of a physician who has been involved in a long-term, complicated medical condition.”

UPTE argues that lower-paid workers are paying a proportionally higher percent of their income on health care premiums than higher-paid workers, especially UC’s top executives.

At the last bargaining session, several UPTE members described their health care and financial hardships to UC’s team. UC’s response was essentially “too bad, get used to it.” UPTE’s bargaining team would like to thank all of those who shared their personal financial and/or medical hardships in an attempt to move UC toward fairer and more equitable healthcare benefits for all.

UPTE has filed an unfair labor practice charge with the state Public Employment Relations Board charging UC with bad-faith bargaining for threatening to go to impasse and imposing its proposals before bargaining even started.

Here are the kind of proposals that would solve UC’s budget concerns and our desire for more fairness:

• Increase health care premiums the same percent for all pay bands; under UC’s proposal, the top pay band’s percentage increase is one-third of the bottom pay band’s percentage increase.
• UC picks up a greater share of the Health Net premium.
• Involve unions in the design and selection of health insurance plans and providers.
• Involve unions in the governance of the pension plan.
• Secure our future retiree health benefits with UC making a contribution to the retiree health benefits trust fund.

Pro-union legislation would protect rights

UPTE’s systemwide executive board has voted to become a co-sponsor of legislation in the California Senate that would strengthen public employee rights.

Senate Bill 931, introduced by Sen. Juan Vargas (D-San Diego), would prohibit public employers from intimidating, coercing, or discriminating against employees for exercising rights guaranteed under many acts granting us collective bargaining and organizing rights, among other things.

In particular, it would prohibit public agencies from using public funds to pay outside consultants or legal advisors for the purpose of counseling public employers about ways to minimize or deter the exercise of guaranteed rights.

The bill is currently pending in the Senate Committee on Public Employment and Retirement.

Mark your calendars for a summer tradition

Union members will gather for a what has become an annual tradition – UPTE’s Summer School – the weekend of June 25 to June 26 in Berkeley.

The two-day event includes training seminars and strategy discussions, with lots of fun sprinkled in.

“We always learn a lot from each other at the summer school,” said Ruby Miller, a staff research associate at UC Riverside and a member of UPTE’s executive board. “As we face challenges to defending the rights of all UC employees, it is more important than ever to make sure we share our knowledge and make our connections with each other stronger and deeper.”

If you are interested in attending the event, contact your UPTE-CWA local for details.
In the news

House cuts all public broadcasting funds; fight moves to Senate

The US House of Representatives has voted to strip all funding from the current year’s budget for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which helps support local stations in the PBS (public television) and NPR (public radio) networks.

The measure is extremely short-sighted and could lead to thousands of lost jobs, along with the high-quality radio and TV programming that more than 170 million Americans tune in to every day.

“This is another example of using the budget process to make an ideological attack, and that’s wrong,” said Jim Joyce, president of the CWA-affiliated National Association of Broadcast Engineers & Technicians. “Losing our public broadcasting operations would be devastating, because a unique source of news, education and entertainment would no longer be available.”

“The importance of public broadcasting should not be underestimated to the communities that are served,” said CWA’s Newspaper Guild president Bernie Lunzer said. “Media industries have shed as many as 40,000 workers over the last four years, substantially reducing local coverage. This would add insult to injury.”

House Republicans are seeking to kill the small, but essential, subsidy for public broadcasting by including it in a $61 million package of cuts in the current year’s budget. The bill now moves to the Senate.

California state budget proposal hurts working and poor people

The California Budget Project has released a graphic analysis of the economic context of the proposed state budget <www.cbp.org/pdfs/2011/110203_chartbook.pdf>.

The study shows that the proposed budget cuts essential services that working and needy people use, and retains taxes that disproportionately affect them. It gives the wealthy and corporations a pass in dealing with the state’s budget problems. Here are some of the most revealing statistics presented in the study:

- Personal income tax will have increased from 37.3% to 55.7% of state revenues, while corporate taxes have declined from 15.4% to 12.3% since 1978.
- California ranks last of all states in the number of teachers per pupil in K-12.
- Corporate profits rose 3 times as fast as corporate taxes over the last 8 years.
- The lowest-paid workers pay the largest share of their income on taxes, while the highest-paid pay the lowest share.
- Hundreds of thousands of people – mainly children, disabled and seniors – will lose their medical care.

There are other, better options, according to the report, such as:

- An oil severance tax (California is one of the only states that does not tax oil extraction).
- Luxury taxes (yachts, inheritance).
- More progressive income taxes, where the wealthy pay more.
- Alcohol and cigarette taxes.

Union Plus offers $50 credit for wireless

Support union workers and get a $50 credit on AT&T cell phone plans, in addition to the 15 percent discount already offered through AT&T’s partnership with Union Plus.

The credit is being offered to new customers who sign up online for a voice plan of $34.99 a month or more by April 29. All plans except iPhone and iPad activations are eligible for credit.

Visit <www.UnionPlus.org/ATT> to learn more and sign up. The wireless discounts are among hundreds of cost-saving Union Plus benefits available to all UPTE members, from scholarships to emergency financial aid to discount movie tickets, that have been helping working families nationwide for 25 years.

Buy a book – help an unemployed worker

Powell’s Books, the famous Portland, Ore., bookstore and the nation’s only unionized online bookseller, is working with its union and customers to help 31 workers who are being laid off due to declining sales.

For each transaction made via the union’s website, Powell’s will donate 7.5 percent of the purchase price to an assistance fund for the workers. Go to <www.ilwulocal5.com>, the website for International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 5. Front and center is a link to Powell’s. Shop for books there and you’ll help fellow union members get back on their feet.

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