

Tax the Rich!

The surge of pro-union activism in Wisconsin is exciting and inspiring, especially coming on the heels of liberation movements in the Middle East. But the struggle there is also frightening. The assault on public-sector unions by Republicans and the billionaires who fund them is not just an assault on public-sector unions; it's an assault on unions in general. And it's not just an assault on unions in general; it's an assault on the working class. The struggle in Madison and beyond is starting to look like the culmination of decades of class struggle from above, with the ruling class aiming now to deal a final death-blow to what remains of an organized working class in the United States.



Building a movement to resist these assaults will be the work of years, even decades. A good place to start is to reframe the fake battles around budgets and deficits to reveal them for what they are: class warfare from above. A recent discussion on the email list of the United Association for Labor Educators provides a great starting point for such a reframing. Steve Schnapp, a veteran popular economics organizer with our neighbors, United for a Fair Economy, had this to say:

There is plenty of money in the United States, and in Wisconsin. It is at the top. The disparity in financial assets is what is hurting us—the top 1% has more financial assets than the bottom 95%. Middle-class wages have been flat for 30 years, while the wealth has floated to the top. It was conservative values that caused the global economic collapse: lack of regulation and a greed-is-good ethic; massive military spending (projected cost of Iraq: \$3 trillion, projected cost of Afghanistan: \$1 trillion); a systematic shift of taxes off of wealth and onto work; and a privatized, for-profit health-care industry. All the sacrifices in this economic downturn are being borne by the bottom 80%, while the top 1% live like kings.

And from Fred Glass of the California Federation of Teachers:

In putting the target back on the 1%, the best arguments are to point out that the top 1% has doubled its share of the national income in the past twenty years, while receiving massive tax cuts. The 1% took all this new money and instead of investing it in productive enterprises in the United States, took it 1) offshore and 2) into financial speculation, which ultimately crashed the economy. State and local public budget deficits are due in the short term to the recession, but in the long term because the money that used to fund our services has been redirected into the pockets of the rich. (Example from my state: the top 1%'s share in California from Congress and Obama's extension of the Bush tax cuts is \$9 billion per year, or one-third of the state's budget deficit over the next 18 months.) When Walker and the other conservatives say "we're broke," they're lying. "We" have plenty of money in this country. It's just in the wrong pockets.

As a contribution to a revived class struggle, this time from below, we offer our "Tax Day Activism Kit"—articles and slogans to cut out, post, and distribute on April 18. The resources you will find throughout this issue and at dollarsandsense.org can provide an alternative and antidote to the faux populist, billionaire-funded Tea Party (which after all came to be portrayed as a nationwide "movement" on Tax Day 2009).

It's time to get organized! No to austerity! Don't blame workers! TAX THE RICH! **D&S**