

# **The future for public sector unions. Part C**

**EN AVANT! (Forward!)**

**July 13, 2012**

Initial compilation by:

Dick Bernard

6905 Romeo Road

Woodbury MN 55125-2421

651-730-4849; c-651-334-5744

dick\_bernard@me.com

[www.outsidethewalls.org/blog](http://www.outsidethewalls.org/blog)

[www.amillioncopies.info](http://www.amillioncopies.info)

[www.chez-nous.net](http://www.chez-nous.net)

## **C - Initial Comments after the Wisconsin Recall Election June 5, 2012**

Comments on Wisconsin Recall Election June 5, 2012

collected by Dick Bernard, retired MEA/Education Minnesota Staff 1972-2000\*

1. **Sue V**, retired MN staff

June 7 2012:

Actually I was hoping the disenfranchised WI voters would take boats across the St. Croix & Mississippi [to MN] and help build our progressive base.

You're right - it isn't the end of the world and it wasn't the first event!

2. **John B**, retired MN staff

June 8 2012

I have many thoughts and feelings about these turns of events. I was chief negotiator for a first contract for my local in Albany, Wisconsin in 1969. And then 40 years of union organizing in Minnesota. How could I not take the loss of the law and the recall failure personally?

On the other hand, I remember that most pioneering teacher union (NEA and AFT) locals in the 60s had to fight for employer recognition, including illegal strikes, when there was no law. The wild wild west attitudes seen during these tumultuous times actually led to state laws authorizing collective bargaining in the 60s and 70s - and the years of inter union rivalry between the AFT and NEA (Ah, the "good old days"?) Ironically, the Wisconsin law was passed without serious partisanship in 1959 prior to the upheavals in the in the 60s. Those were different times - in many, many ways.

So maybe teachers and other workers need to reinvent themselves, their unions, examine the complacency often a bi-product of business unionism and learn again the strategies and tactics of ORGANIZING! \*\*

Minnesota public employees are one governor's veto away from Walkerism in Minnesota.

More later. I'll be anxious to read what other veterans have say.

3. **Pinky B**, retired MN staff

June 8, 2012

Thanks for your e-mail and Dick's commentary! If I were smart enough to put my thoughts to pen and ink, I would probably suggest that the public sector unions recall their retired, most vocal, and surly, not-to-be-denied, firebrands and start the process all over again! In my mind it's much like it was back in the early 50's and 60's when public employees had not yet awakened to the need to coalesce! I have talked with a few of my old compatriots, and I have reached the conclusion that they see no need to revitalize their organization, Even with Wisconsin just across the river, most of them believe "it can't happen here", and many of the current teachers do not remember pre-bargaining [days]!

No more soap-boxes! PINKY

4. **Bob Barkley**, retired Ohio and NEA staff

June 9, 2012

This says it all. What goes around comes around, so get ready for a return to the things that got us here -- REAL organizing including strikes and all that goes with them. I have never been a fan of the political avenue unless you are in control.

<http://truth-out.org/news/item/9661-the-silver-lining-in-walkers-victory#.T9OZF0gaCe8.email>

5. **Dick Bernard**, retired MN staff

June 9, 2012

Bob, what is frustrating about this, is that I have been saying this, and saying this, and saying this, and the first two 'chapters' of my Uncomfortable Essays\*\* say this, and I was saying it to the peace and justice folks in 2007, and the Essays when I published them in 2008.... Rather than get stuck in the pity pot, and quit, there has to be scratch organizing at the basic level: "each one reach two", and this includes in the home town in the rural areas.

But too many people on the left want a silver bullet that requires NOTHING of them, literally: it's Obama's fault; the DNC's; the local precinct chairs...but don't ask me to do a damn thing, no contribution to campaigns, give me Ron Paul.... Or, as bad, I don't want to change my behaviors. The other guys got to change to do things my way. Or the political parties has this strategy, and this will be the strategy.

Yes, I'm very frustrated with our own people.

I'm thinking back to a political organizing thing NEA put on at Lake Geneva WI in the spring of 1994. By then, it was clear to everybody in the room that the Democrats were in deep trouble in the '94 elections, but the Democrat folks came in and were talking confident talk about November. I don't know if they believed their fantasy, or just wanted us lowly field staff for state associations get pumped up, but we knew we were going to have problems. But it was business as usual organizing.

Back in Jan. 1980 I was at NEA and then at the White House for backgrounding on the Carter re-election campaign. You know how that turned out. My memories of them were that things were a bit more promising than they were later in the year, and the campaign committee for Carter was a bit more realistic, than the '94 bunch.

But the key is people like on this little list who like to bitch about Obama, and about anybody, but don't expect me to do anything.

Tell me I'm off base!!!!

I think the biggest potential win on Tuesday was that Senate Seat, and [while] the article says, well, that doesn't mean anything.... It means one hell of a lot, in my opinion. All politics is local. Put up with Walker for two years, and get rid of him.

I've gotta quit writing this long epistle, before you quit reading.

6. **Bob B**, retired Ohio and NEA staff

June 9, 2012

You're right. It's where I am as well. And agency fee was the worst thing that happened -- and we were warned of that by our colleagues in Michigan, but it was too inviting on the short term and here we are.

7. **Jermitt K**, retired WI staff

June 9, 2012

Your comments\* are right on target. Many of us who voted for Tom Barrett have tried to analyze the recent election. From talking to friends and neighbors and listening to WPR, we have found several stated reasons why various people voted for Walker. Initially we were concerned it was a vote against unions, and in many cases it was. Polling that followed the voting at the various polling places found about a 40-40 split with 10% having expressed no opinion. That issue, as an isolated issue would not have given Walker the winning margin. Other factors high on our list for Walker winning include:

- People didn't want to overturn a governor based on policy change.
- Attack ads regardless if true or not, had a negative impact on Barrett's chances for governor.
- Money matters! While the final figures are still out. It appears to be around a 10 to 1 ratio in favor of Walker.
- In three suburban counties north and west of Milwaukee County, Walker had 150,000 margin of votes over Barrett.
- Barrett was not a strong candidate for the Democrats.

- 30+ % of union members and union family members voted for Walker.
- The potential indictment of Walker was a very small factor in people's decision to vote against him.

• Many want to give Walkers policies a chance to see if they will work or not.

Factors that should have been given more weight in this election in our opinion were:

- The serious attack by Walker on Public education
- His attack on public employees
- Nearly 2/3 of Walker campaign funds came from outside sources
- The long term impact of Walkers policies on small town and rural communities
- His attack on the elderly and children who are in poverty.
- His attack on Women and their rights for good health care,
- His attack on Wisconsin's environment.

A major concern for many of us continues to be how so many people base their decision on 30 second ads. Very few look at the long term impact of decision made by the legislature, including the legislative members who are suppose to be leaders.

If we give up now, we are the ones who become responsible. Positive change comes to those who are tenacious in their beliefs and act on them.

\* #577 - Dick Bernard: Election 2012 #22. The Wisconsin Recall Election. Some Musings Driving U.S. Highway 61"

#### 8. **Candace L**, NEA staff

July 10, 2012

We must be excited by winning the battle to assert the way(s) we want to live with others and actually implementing the vision. We have to stop being excited by simply engaging in the battle, as if success was not obtainable.

Please let me know if you know anyone else who wants to change the system instead of just "messaging" with those who control it.

Leaning forward,  
Candace

P.S. Engaging the NEA-Retired community in dialogue about these issues is very powerful. Thank you!  
I always read your posts.

#### 9. **Stephanie W**, retired MN staff

June 11, 2012

I have been trying to get my thoughts together since the Wisconsin recall fiasco. I probably won't be as eloquent as others who have responded but here are my thoughts. Would love to get together...I am out of town from June 25-July 5.

1. The recall was a mistake. I thought it was from the time it was announced. I think people thought they could win the war with this move; they didn't even win the battle. The Koch brothers and others have unlimited funds...one more election wasn't going to

break them. But “we” were asking people to get energized yet again, to donate time and money yet again, and to be out there as targets in an election where there was no other real issue. **And** we asked them to come out for an election where we ran someone who had to fend off others to get the nomination and who had already lost to Walker. (I am using “we” to mean those of us whose heads are screwed on correctly!).

2. Barack Obama and the Democratic party are in big trouble. Some of you on this list have already heard me say this, so please bear with me. We lost the 2010 midterm elections because the Obama folks and the Democratic party failed us and, in doing so, they failed our country. When you are elected president you are the head of the party...period. I don't care if you don't like the rough-and-tumble of politics. It's your responsibility, and that of your party staffers, to make sure you have a Congress you can work with...and that means turning out the base...the old base like all of us, and the new base of voters who cast their first votes in 2008.

I believe many of those new voters, especially those younger ones, figured they had done their jobs by voting and ... presto! Obama got elected. Job well done. No one in the party structure had the sense or foresight to realize that these voters needed to be educated about how a president can't do it all...he/she needs a Congress they can work with. We are not in the LBJ-Everett Dirksen days where leaders of the opposing parties could share cigars and bourbon and compromise to do what is right. We are in a street fight. If you don't like street fighting then you have chosen the wrong profession.

I think it was Tip O'Neill who said “there are no final victories.” Indeed. Just like basic organizing you build upon past successes and you never forget where you came from...a lesson that may be learned too late by the Obama campaign.

10. **Mary Ellen W**, Retired MN teacher, Sub in Madison WI Public Schools  
June 11, 2012

I read through everything, nodding my head in agreement for nearly all of it.

Some quick reactions:

The WI Democrats (and the WEAC and MTI teachers unions) goofed in several ways--in my opinion:

1. the senators who fled the state rather than be outvoted certainly have not played much chess. They could not see more than two moves ahead. Many WI people were offended---others were puzzled. We kept hoping they had a plan. They didn't.
2. equating the huge demonstrations at the capitol to the Arab spring was a total blunder. We are not a third-world country. An even bigger blunder was to not create and sustain something positive out of all that energy. OK, the recall counts, but it could be much more.
3. We will certainly hear more about the price of cleaning the building and grounds and the price of the recall elections----I am not confident that anyone is tackling that.
4. Kathleen Falk----a good person who got a raw deal---shamefully---from the teacher's union!
5. Most important---they were still handing out Recall Walker bumper stickers (at the Sat

Farmers Market) when they should have been giving Elect Barrett bumper stickers.

Finally, I think Candace is correct: our goal should be to extend benefits and protections to the whole working population. Our country, society and culture need quality dependable workers in all sectors. Let's be sure the rewards are there----no matter what job a person does. Showing up and working everyday for thirty (or forty!) years is monumentally valuable ---to all of us. Work is valuable. Period. That means that I think another goof was to accept the cuts in benefits so readily...

11. **Denise K**, Racine WI resident and activist

June 13, 2012

Regarding the election, you were spot on with your analysis. The silence here has been deafening on both sides. Part of this might just be "election hangover".

I live in the district where John Lehman (D) won the election over Van Wangaard. As of today, there were 55 additional votes for John Lehman, but Van Wangaard still has not made a statement. This election in Racine may well change the pace of what is now going on in Wisconsin. I am very familiar with both men by reputation, and I know that John Lehman would (as he has in the past) better serve our district and state. I could write more about this in length, but I am sure that you don't want to hear all of the inner workings of one district in our state. It is just good that we have so many people here who care deeply about the community.

If it were up to me, I would ban all political funding, and just give each candidate air time and written time for a debate, but I am only one voice.

Thank you for keeping me in the loop with all of this.

\* - Dick's blogposts on the June 5 issue at <http://www.outsidethewalls.org/blog/> for May 29, June 5, 6, 7 and 11, 2012

Comments to my own list on June 8, 2012:

1. I am guessing those family members of mine I saw at the funeral in southwest Wisconsin mostly voted for Walker on Tuesday. They are good people, German Catholics going back as far as the 1840s there. They respect me, but they wouldn't ask me who to vote for, nor would I be so foolish as to volunteer an opinion to them.
2. Organizing is an at-home street by street job, neighbor to neighbor. You pay your dues just by being there, listening, participating. It can't be farmed out.
3. I was surprised, but only a little, when I got such a ho-hum response to those Uncomfortable Essays I published four years ago (<http://www.outsidethewalls.org/blog/?m=20110308>). At the time I had six years in the peace and justice movement, including in the leadership level. I knew the ground. I distributed 500 or so copies, free, and made them accessible on the internet. My key idea was scratch organizing "each one reach two" (#1&2, pp 3-7). It seemed a perfect fit for the protest crowd - earn recruits one person at a time, a total of two. I have seen almost

nothing done with the document. It is easier to go back to the old ways, whether they work or not.... In Wisconsin and elsewhere, this would work perfectly IF it were adapted to local circumstances.

4. I stand my ground (in the blogpost) that the Republicans have not won in Wisconsin. After folks regroup it's time to get to work. There has to be a mindset change, however. We can be our own worst enemies.

In 2008 I saw a huge outpouring of support for the election of President Obama; within months he was deserted and blamed for all ills. He'd been hired, then fired, by people who had excessive expectations of what he could/should do.

In 2010 huge numbers of 2010 voters stayed at home, all for good (in their minds) reasons. The result was what we see: Tea Party dominance. If we look for someone to blame, we should start with ourselves first.

In 2012, I think there is huge potential for change IF we get past hopelessness and do some work within our own spheres of influence. But we won't get there by blaming Washington, or Obama, or the Democratic Party. It's in our court.

\*\* - Dick's thoughts on new organizing at blog, type Uncomfortable Essays in Search Box, and note especially essays #1&2 pp 3-7. Essay #15, pp 37-43, by himself and several former colleague association staffers, discusses the same issue from recollection of Association experiences applied to Peace and Justice movements.