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Details: Public Hearing – December 6, 2007

(FORM UPDATED: 07/12/2010)

**WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE ...
PUBLIC HEARING - COMMITTEE RECORDS**

2007-08

(session year)

Senate

(Assembly, Senate or Joint)

Committee on ... Education (SC-Ed)

COMMITTEE NOTICES ...

- Committee Reports ... **CR**
- Executive Sessions ... **ES**
- Public Hearings ... **PH**
- Record of Comm. Proceedings ... **RCP**

INFORMATION COLLECTED BY COMMITTEE FOR AND AGAINST PROPOSAL

- Appointments ... **Appt**
- Clearinghouse Rules ... **CRule**
- Hearing Records ... bills and resolutions
(**ab** = Assembly Bill) (**ar** = Assembly Resolution) (**ajr** = Assembly Joint Resolution)
(**sb** = Senate Bill) (**sr** = Senate Resolution) (**sjr** = Senate Joint Resolution)
- Miscellaneous ... **Misc**

MB

Vote Record Committee on Education

Date: 1/29/2008

Moved by: Erpenbach Seconded by: Hansen

AB _____ **SE 108** _____ Clearinghouse Rule _____
 AJR _____ SJR _____ Appointment _____
 AR _____ SR _____ Other _____

A/S Amdt _____
 A/S Amdt _____ to A/S Amdt _____
 A/S Sub Amdt _____
 A/S Amdt _____ to A/S Sub Amdt _____
 A/S Amdt _____ to A/S Amdt _____ to A/S Sub Amdt _____

Be recommended for:

- Passage Adoption Confirmation Concurrence Indefinite Postponement
 Introduction Rejection Tabling Nonconcurrence

<u>Committee Member</u>	<u>Aye</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Absent</u>	<u>Not Voting</u>
Senator John Lehman, Chair	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senator Jon Erpenbach	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senator David Hansen	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senator Pat Kreitlow	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senator Luther Olsen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senator Glenn Grothman	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senator Mary Lazich	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Totals:	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>

Motion Carried

Motion Failed



Stromme, Denise

From: John DeRosier [oinkers@discover-net.net]

Sent: Monday, December 03, 2007 11:01 PM

To: Sen.Kreitlow; Sen.Lehman; Sen.Vinehout; Joanne Ricca; Kenneth Germanson; Jerry LaPoint; Jack Connell; Will Fantle; Jeff Smith

Cc: John DeRosier

Subject: SB 108

file
SB 108

Good day,

Please support SB 108. I have a Master of Arts-U.S.History degree (1998) from UW-Eau Claire, specialty, labor history. Consequently, I am well aware of the many contributions made by organized labor, including the 40-hour work week, overtime pay, workers' compensation, disability pay, paid holidays, safe working conditions and decent wages and benefits, just to name a few. However, few of our young people are aware of what organized labor has accomplished for them. One reason is because labor history, which still plays an important role in our lives, is not taught in our public schools.

I have been requested to speak at many of our high school classes on the subject of labor history, which I did. I learned that the students were anxious and willing to learn about labor history. Labor history is an integral part of Wisconsin's history, indeed, labor has long had a major role in Wisconsin, stemming from the 19th century. Even today many Wisconsin families have a strong labor tradition. We simply can't go on ignoring labor history & it's contributions; to do so is wrong and robs our students of a well-rounded education & of learning about the vital role of labor.

In order to understand and learn about Wisconsin and the U.S., one needs to study and learn labor history.

Thank You,
John DeRosier
1316 Altoona Ave.
Eau Claire, WI 54701
715 839 0327



WISCONSIN TEAMSTERS JOINT COUNCIL No. 39

Affiliated with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters



FRED GEGARE
President
1546 Main Street
Green Bay, WI 54302
920-435-8895
FAX 920-435-1522

PAUL G. LOVINUS
Secretary-Treasurer
10020 West Greenfield Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53214
414-258-4545
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December 5, 2007

TONY CORNELIUS
Vice-President
1546 Main Street
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WAYNE SCHULTZ
Recording Secretary
1314 N. Spaighton Road
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GEROLD JACOBS
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Trustee
P.O. Box 86
Eau Claire, WI 54702

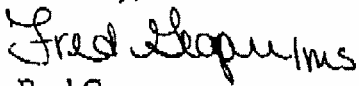
Distinguished members of the Senate's Committee on Education:

Due to a prior commitment I unfortunately can not be in Madison to deliver this message to you personally. However, on behalf of the more than forty thousand Teamster members who live in Wisconsin I would like to register our support for SB108 which pertains to the inclusion of the history of organized labor in America.

As you know, the organized labor movement in this country has made huge contributions to the advancement of the living and working conditions of Americans. Those advancements often required that enormous obstacles as well as entrenched and frequently violent opposition had to be overcome. Often times the economic elite who opposed better working conditions resorted to inflicting physical injury, economic blackmail and even death to our brothers and sisters who led these forces of change.

In 2007 the average working American enjoys a much higher standard of living. This is a standard that has been built on the backs of generations of union men and women. Sadly, many of our young people have little or no idea about the history of the weekends off, forty hour work weeks and child labor protections that they enjoy. SB108 will help to enlighten the next generation of Wisconsin students about the vital role that organized labor has played in their daily lives and their economic future.

Thank you for your time and I sincerely hope that we can count on your support for this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

Fred Gegare
President

FG/ms



Stromme, Denise

From: Kenneth Germanson [advoken@sbcglobal.net]
Sent: Thursday, December 06, 2007 8:18 AM
To: Sen.Lehman
Cc: Sen.Erpenbach; Sen.Hansen; Sen.Kreitlow; Sen.Olsen; Sen.Grothman; Sen.Lazich
Subject: Support for SB 108
Attachments: LaborHistoryBill Fact Sheet 07.doc

Dear Senator Lehman:

Thank you for sponsoring and holding a hearing on Senate Bill 108 which would require school districts to teach labor history and collective bargaining in the schools.

As president of the Wisconsin Labor History Society, I had planned on attending and testifying at the hearing today (Thursday, Dec.6), but an unexpected medical problem precludes my ability to attend. I express my regrets at not being there to support your bill.

I am attaching a copy of our views about this bill.

Again, thank you for your interest in this important piece of legislation.

Kenneth A. Germanson, President, Wisconsin Labor History Society
313 E. Plainfield Ave., Milwaukee WI 53213 (home)
414-687-6954 (cell)

cc: Members of Senate Education Committee

Request in favor

Some Reasons Why We Need SB 108 . . .

The State Legislature needs to require every school district in Wisconsin to include the teaching of labor history and collective bargaining in its curriculum because:

Teaching about labor has been largely ignored in our schools. An examination of text books in history and the social sciences finds barely a mention about the contributions of workers and their unions in the making of our nation.

It's time to balance the scales. Most school children readily hear about the corporate leaders and politicians of our nation's history; rarely do they hear about the heroes among our working people who struggled to bring equity and justice into the workplace and into our communities.

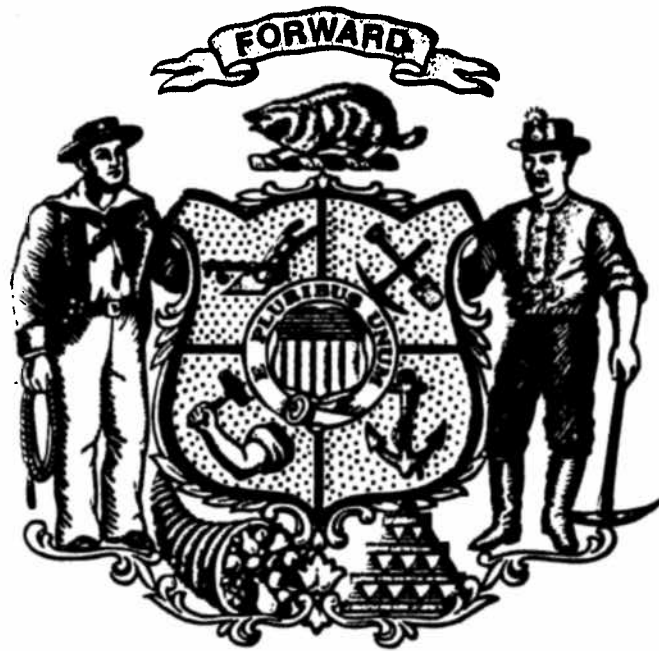
Trade unions in Wisconsin and throughout the nation have contributed to our way of life. Such contributions include: the 8-hour day, health care insurance, vacations and holidays, a fair wage scale, safe and healthful working conditions, Social Security and Medicare, unemployment and workers compensation, plus civil rights, including voting rights laws. Our nation's public education system, including its universities, is a product of the constant support of labor unions and their members.

Labor unions are part of Wisconsin's heritage. The state has always been at the forefront of worker struggles, including the Bay View Tragedy of 1886 during the 8-hour day movement, the Great Oshkosh woodworker strike of 1898 involving historic participation of Clarence Darrow in conspiracy trials, the creation of labor-management cooperation in the Wisconsin River valley that brought prosperity and labor peace to that area, the organizing among our industrial plants during the 1930s and 1940s, which brought about a good standard of living to our workers.

Most Wisconsin families have a labor tradition. By the 1950s, more than 35% of Wisconsin workers had joined unions. Their stories were "front page news" daily.

Cost of School Districts will be minimal. The proposed law leaves it up to each district to develop its own method of teaching about labor history and collective bargaining. Teaching materials are readily available, and can be inserted within existing curricula.

The story of labor and workers can provide more excitement in the classroom. The need to make history alive and interesting to students is critical in today's schools. The struggles of working people will prompt many students to look back upon their own families and backgrounds, making history more relevant.



Stromme, Denise

From: Susan McMurray [smcmurray@tds.net]
Sent: Thursday, December 06, 2007 9:45 AM
To: Sen.Lehman; Sen.Erpenbach; Sen.Kreitlow; Sen.Olsen; Sen.Grothman; Sen.Lazich
Cc: Sen.Hansen; Rep.Zepnick; pneuenfeldt@wisaficio.org; jricca@wisaficio.org; Sen.Coggs; Sen.Vinehout; Sen.Decker; Rep.Fitzgerald; The Wheeler Report
Subject: AFSCME on SB 108 - Sen Ed Cmte - today
Importance: High
Attachments: labor history memo from AFSCME.doc

This memo describes AFSCME's strong support for Senate Bill 108 which would make the teaching of labor history a requirement in public schools. We thank Senator Hansen and Rep. Zepnick for their efforts to support teaching history from a working person's perspective.

Feel free to call me if you have any questions or if you are interested in knowing more about AFSCME's own labor history.

Susan McMurray
AFSCME
279-9697



WISCONSIN OFFICE • 8033 Excelsior Drive, Suite A • Madison, Wisconsin 53717-1903 • Telephone 608/836-6666

Thursday, December 6, 2007

To: Members, Senate Education Committee

From: Susan McMurray, AFSCME legislative representative (279-9697)

Re: SB 108, teaching labor history to children in public schools

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) supports SB 108, which would give schoolchildren across Wisconsin an opportunity to learn American history from a working person's perspective.

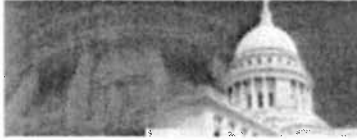
Labor history in our country is replete with examples of the resistance by average people against horrendous working conditions, poverty, discrimination, greed and exploitation. Through struggle, workers achieved decent wages and benefits, safer working conditions and strong worker protection laws. These things did not just *happen*, working men and women fought hard to achieve these goals.

Within the world of AFSCME, we teach Wisconsin labor history to our members. We remind them that Wisconsin has been trailblazer in passing laws to improve the conditions of workers in our state. We were the first state to enact an unemployment insurance law. We paved the way for a strong workers compensation law that became the standard across the U.S.

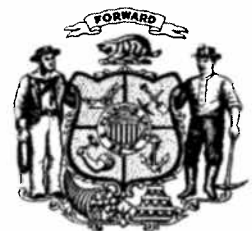
Anyone who participates in the Wisconsin Retirement Systems owes gratitude to Mrs. Ingeborg Sidwell, who worked 23 years scrubbing the floors of the state Capitol. It was Mrs. Sidwell who went directly to Governor Walter S. Goodland when she heard he had vetoed the pension law. So persuasive was Mrs. Sidwell about the need to protect older workers that Gov. Goodland sent a message to lawmakers asking them to override his own veto. That is the story of how our state pension system came to be.

This is labor history. Passing SB 108 will give our children a chance to learn these and many other amazing stories about laws that were passed that continue to affect our lives, our working conditions and workplaces today.

Thank you.



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE



Dauscher, Sara

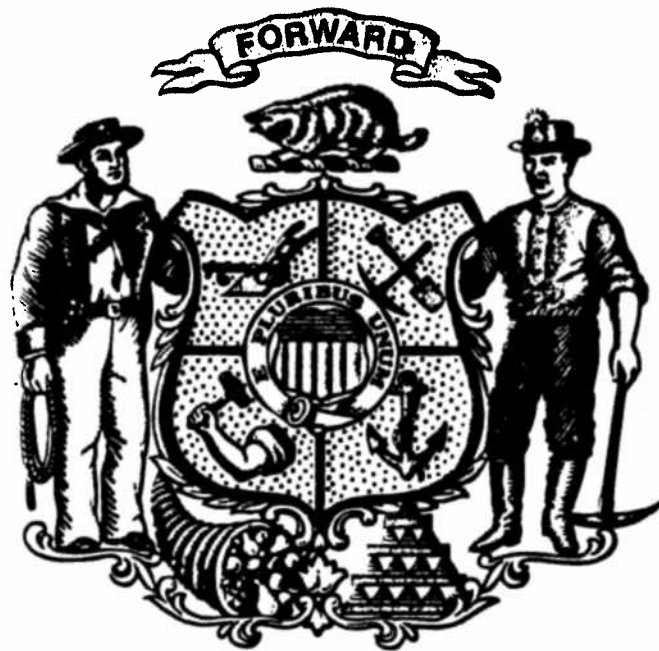
From: Stromme, Denise
Sent: Thursday, December 06, 2007 9:48 AM
To: Dauscher, Sara
Subject: FW: AFSCME on SB 108 - Sen Ed Cmte - today
Importance: High
Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Red
Attachments: labor history memo from AFSCME.doc

From: Susan McMurray [mailto:smcmurray@tds.net]
Sent: Thursday, December 06, 2007 9:45 AM
To: Sen.Lehman; Sen.Erpenbach; Sen.Kreitlow; Sen.Olsen; Sen.Grothman; Sen.Lazich
Cc: Sen.Hansen; Rep.Zepnick; pneuenfeldt@wisafcio.org; jricca@wisafcio.org; Sen.Coggs; Sen.Vinehout; Sen.Decker; Rep.Fitzgerald; The Wheeler Report
Subject: AFSCME on SB 108 - Sen Ed Cmte - today
Importance: High

This memo describes AFSCME's strong support for Senate Bill 108 which would make the teaching of labor history a requirement in public schools. We thank Senator Hansen and Rep. Zepnick for their efforts to support teaching history from a working person's perspective.

Feel free to call me if you have any questions or if you are interested in knowing more about AFSCME's own labor history.

Susan McMurray
AFSCME
279-9697





STATE REPRESENTATIVE
JOSH ZEPNICK
WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY

December 6, 2007

Senator John Lehman
Committee on Education
Room 310 South
State Capitol
P.O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Senator Lehman,

Thank you for your leadership and holding an executive session on Senate Bill 108, relating to requiring instruction in public schools on the history of organized labor in America and the collective bargaining process. As you know, I am a co-author of this legislation and have been an author of this legislation in past legislative sessions

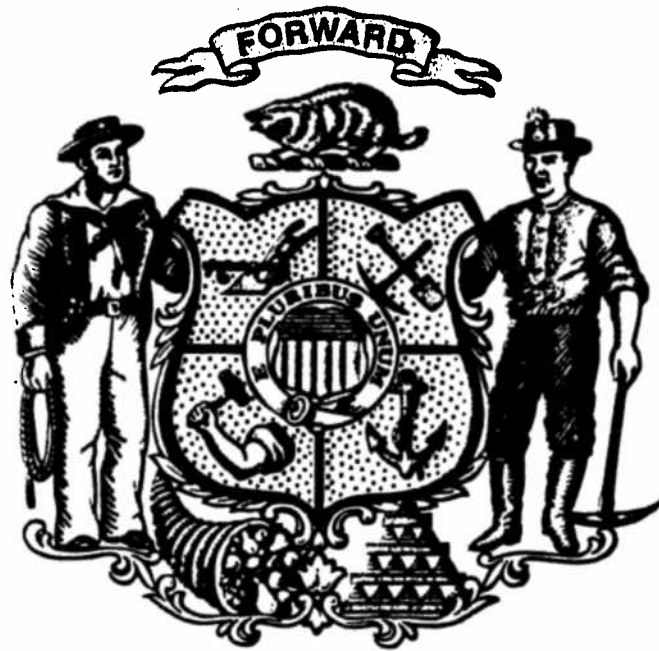
It is through this bill, which we hope to encourage public schools throughout Wisconsin to teach our youth about the civic and economic contributions of working men and women in our state. By ignoring the history of organized labor and the collective bargaining process in America, schools are failing to teach our children about a central piece of American democracy: *our workforce*. Furthermore, we already expend significant classroom resources to teach our children about comparable issues such as financial literacy, market economics, and the impact of the industrial and information revolutions.

In the past, there have been obstacles in moving "labor history" bills through the legislature, and I am glad that this issue that I care about greatly, can once again make progress in this current legislative session.

Once again, thank you for your leadership and I appreciate in advance your support for this legislation.

Sincerely,

Josh Zepnick
State Representative
9th Assembly District





TO: Senate Education Committee
FROM: Phil Neuenfeldt, Secretary-Treasurer
DATE: December 6, 2007

**RE: Support for Senate Bill 108
Teaching Labor History in Public Schools**

Senate Bill 108 requires that school districts include the history of organized labor and the collective bargaining process in their instructional program. It does not require additional teachers, or special classes or new texts. The implementation of SB 108 is left to school districts and teachers who will know best how to cover the topic, and instructional materials based on Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards are available for teachers to use to fulfill this requirement.

Union members and progressive allies fought for the eight-hour day, child labor laws, safe workplace standards, pensions, health insurance coverage, overtime rights, vacations, minimum wage laws, unemployment insurance, worker's compensation, civil rights laws, family and medical leave rights and many more reforms too numerous to mention. Labor unions led the successful drive for universal free public education for every child. The labor movement has always viewed public education as fundamental to the productive participation of everyone in our society. Yet, the vital history of that same labor movement is largely ignored in history textbooks and the public school curriculum. This denies our youth a well-rounded education, handicaps their ability to deal with the world in which they will work, and leaves them without knowledge of the essential role of the American labor movement in ensuring democratic rights. Senate Bill 108 will help fill that void.

The labor movement is not asking for special attention; we are asking for balance. The perspective of business is fully represented in textbooks. Business also has the financial resources to flood the schools with additional free curriculum materials to promote its views. We are asking for legislators to affirm that the history of workers and the unions they created is important and deserves to be given proper recognition in our schools. Senate Bill 108 will help accomplish that goal, and we ask for your support.

PLN/JR/mj:opeiu#9,afl-cio,clc



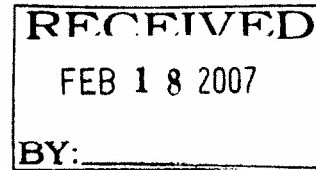


Wisconsin State AFL-CIO *...the voice for working families.*

David Newby, President • Sara J. Rogers, Exec. Vice President • Phillip L. Neuenfeldt, Secretary-Treasurer

TO: Members of the Senate

FROM: Phil Neuenfeldt, Secretary-Treasurer
Wisconsin State AFL-CIO
Ken Germanson
Wisconsin Labor History Society



DATE: February 15, 2008

RE: **Support for Senate Bill 108**
Teaching Labor History in Schools

During the committee hearing held on this legislation, some questions were raised by Senators that we wanted to address more thoroughly:

What makes labor history unique in that it deserves to be mandated as a subject to be taught in Wisconsin's schools?

Workers hold a special place in the history of Wisconsin. All you need do is look at the Great Seal of the State of Wisconsin! It's all about workers: farmers, miners, blacksmiths, sailors and the tools of their trade. It's the only state seal in the United States that so honors its workers.

Wisconsin historically has been an industrial giant of the United States: Milwaukee was the machine tool capital of the world and our river valleys (the Fox and the Wisconsin and the Flambeau) were the sites of massive paper production; Eau Claire and LaCrosse were huge in rubber manufacturing and other goods; Beloit in shoes, machinery and foundries; Janesville and Kenosha in automobiles; Racine in farm equipment and auto parts.

In each of these industrial areas, workers unionized; they struggled and fought to gain decent wages and working conditions and helped to give all Wisconsin citizens a decent standard of living. Their struggles were dramatic, like the massacre of workers in Bay View in 1886 fighting for the eight-hour day, the city-wide strike of millworkers in Oshkosh in 1898 and the sit down strikes and organizing of the 1930s.

Wisconsin's Progressive traditions also stem out of the support from the state's labor unions during the early 20th Century. Wisconsin's original workers compensation act passed in 1911 and was the first state law of its kind in the U.S. which served as a model for others. The unemployment compensation law was

passed in 1931, and the state was the first in the nation to issue an unemployment benefit check in 1936. Organized labor historically supported a strong public school system and was key to the creating of our state's first rate university and technical college systems.

For most of the 20th Century, Wisconsin has been one of the nation's most heavily unionized states and it continues to be -- virtually every family in Wisconsin has a union member past or present in its family tree. To leave out the history of unions in Wisconsin is to leave out a major part of the state's history.

What about other requests to legislators for inclusion in the state's "Educational Goals?"

Workers and labor unions are so basic to the history of Wisconsin that requests from other groups cannot be viewed as comparable. Requests from religious groups, for instance, to include specific theological beliefs in a curriculum would be inappropriate as a mandated public school educational goal.

Already, the goals include specific mention of "cooperative marketing and consumers' cooperatives" (118.01 (2) 3), an appropriate inclusion given the historic importance of cooperatives in the state. So, too, is the listing under the "understanding human relations" goal as it particularly refers to American Indians, Black Americans and Hispanics (118.01 (2) (c) 8). Any additional requests for inclusion in the goals should be judged on the same standards as these inclusions: are they a critical part of the state's history and its nature? Labor belongs with these groups.

Will this not bring added costs to a school district?

It is unlikely that districts will incur additional costs. History and social studies teachers could easily adjust current curricula to include a discussion of labor history, which fits naturally into many areas of instruction. Easily accessible teaching materials are available on the Internet. DPI has published a balanced curriculum on labor history specifically designed to meet educational standards, entitled, "Lessons in Labor History." (See http://dpi.wi.gov/pubsales/global_9.html)

Why teach about unions when there have been some instances of corruption and violence?

All human institutions, including corporations, public agencies, churches and labor, experience cases of corruption and violence. Yet, such transgressions are usually only a minor part of the history of any of these institutions. The role of unions in our society is part of our history and should be taught. To throw out the major achievements of labor unions due to the corruption or violence of a few is dishonest and wrong.

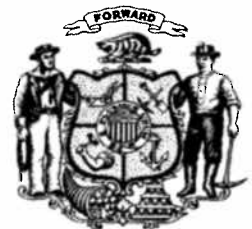
Aren't unions irrelevant today?

Labor unions continue to be relevant to our society. Besides their role in working to protect their own members, unions historically and to the present day continue to offer a voice for ALL workers and consumers in such matters as wage and hour standards, occupational and environmental safety, health care, basic civil rights, consumer safety and similar matters. Recent figures show, too, a revitalized growth among unions and stronger public support.

The union experience offers an important lesson in citizenship for today's youth. Labor unions show the value of our democracy in that they exhibit how ordinary citizens are able to band together to bring about positive change in society; they demonstrate that workers could organize and work together to overcome the oppression placed upon them by what appeared to be superior forces of economic might. In today's world the message that ordinary folks are able to have an impact is a message all youth should learn.



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE



Stromme, Denise

From: Tim Deneen [utulo56@gmail.com]

Sent: Monday, February 18, 2008 2:31 PM

To: Sen.Breske; Sen.Carpenter; Sen.Coggs; Sen.Cowles; Sen.Darling; Sen.Decker; Sen.Ellis; Sen.Erpenbach; Sen.Fitzgerald; Sen.Grothman; Sen.Hansen; Sen.Harsdorf; Sen.Jauch; Sen.Kanavas; Sen.Kapanke; Sen.Kedzie; Sen.Lasee; Sen.Lassa; Sen.Lazich; Sen.Leibham; Sen.Miller; Sen.Olsen; Sen.Plale; Sen.Risser; Sen.Robson; Sen.Roessler; Sen.Schultz; Sen.Taylor; Sen.Vinehout; Sen.Wirch; Sen.Kreitlow; Sen.Lehman; Sen.Sullivan

Subject: SB 108

Dear Senator, On behalf of the members of the United Transportation Union, I am requesting your support of Senate Bill 108. Labor History is essential to understanding the American Experience, and the creation of the middle class. Wisconsin's history is rich with progressive measures founded within the labor movement. Knowledge, gained through discussion and debate, requires doors to be opened. This legislation will open many doors for Wisconsin students. Thank you,

--

Tim Deneen, Director
United Transportation Union
Wisconsin Legislative Board, LO 056
7 N Pinckney Street, Suite 320
Madison, Wisconsin 53703-2840
608 251 4120
utulo56@gmail.com
<http://www.mailbag.com/users/utulo56/index.html>





AFSCME®

WISCONSIN OFFICE • 8033 Excelsior Drive, Suite A • Madison, Wisconsin 53717-1903 • Telephone 608/836-6666

Tuesday, February 19, 2008

To: Members, Wisconsin State Senate

From: Susan McMurray, AFSCME legislative representative

Re: SB 108, teaching labor history to children in public schools

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) supports SB 108, which would give schoolchildren across Wisconsin an opportunity to learn American history from a working person's perspective.

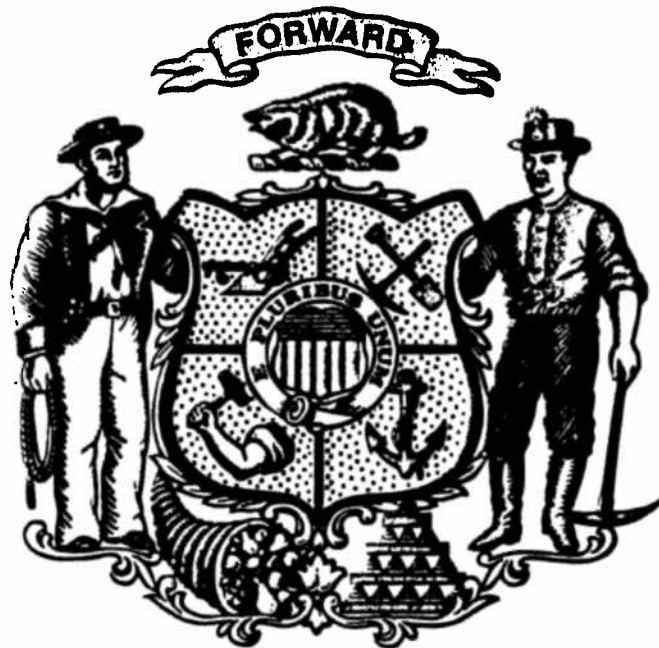
Labor history in our country is replete with examples of the resistance by average people against horrendous working conditions, poverty, discrimination, greed and exploitation. Through struggle, workers achieved decent wages and benefits, safer working conditions and strong worker protection laws. These things did not just *happen*, working men and women fought hard to achieve these goals.

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Anyone who participates in the Wisconsin Retirement Systems owes gratitude to Mrs. Ingeborg Sidwell, who worked 23 years scrubbing the floors of the state Capitol. Mrs. Sidwell went directly to Governor Walter S. Goodland when she heard he had vetoed the pension law. So persuasive was Mrs. Sidwell about the need to protect older workers that Gov. Goodland sent a message to lawmakers asking them to override his own veto. They did, and that is the story of how our state pension system came to be.

This is labor history. Passing SB 108 will give our children a chance to learn these and many other amazing stories about laws that were passed that continue to affect our lives, our working conditions and workplaces today.

Thank you. Any questions, call me at 279-9697.





Timothy S. Deneen (312) Director-Chair
United Transportation Union
Wisconsin Legislative Board, LO 056
UTU Political Action Committee
7 North Pinckney Street, Suite 320
Madison, Wisconsin 53703-4262

Tim Deneen <utulo56@gmail.com>

Legacy of labor

1 message

John Risch <utu@bls.midco.net>
To: Frank Wilner2 <fnw.rail@worldnet.att.net>

Tue, Dec 4, 2007 at 8:32 F

Glad for legacy of labor

By ROBYN BLUMNER, Times columnist
Published December 2, 2007

SB 108 ?

I have a middle-class life. My employer pays me a living wage, provides health insurance, grants me days off when I'm sick and offers vacation pay. And while I'm not a member of a union, as a student of American history I know that the legacy of the labor movement is largely the reason that I enjoy these benefits today.

Too few Americans have any idea why they are decently treated by employers who then turn around and exploit workers overseas. Americans just assume it's a birthright. It's not.

The truth is, there was nothing historically inevitable about the rise of the middle class and the great shared prosperity enjoyed by Americans after World War II. There had been rich societies before: think ancient Rome, the Ottoman Turks, the British Empire. But none had spawned the remarkable equality in the distribution of wealth that America had, where the benefits of economic activity were widely shared even among those at the lower rungs. Even today, resource-rich countries like Nigeria, with its massive reserves of oil, consign most citizens to desperate poverty while a small elite enjoys riches beyond imagining.

America has had a very different trajectory. We catapulted the majority of our citizens into the middle classes within a very short time frame in the mid 20th century. This was due to an economic culture of shared rewards established by unions and a progressive government through a new legal regime.

This government-labor partnership, starting with FDR, protected union organizers from violence and retaliation, produced groundbreaking wage, hour and worker safety laws, used progressive taxation to invest in infrastructure and education, and generally promised that government was going to stand on the side of the worker, rather than big business, where it had always previously stood.

After World War II, unionization rates hit historical highs of more than a third of workers, which explains why as productivity rose by 103.7 percent between 1947 and 1973, and median family income rose by 103.9 percent. Unions successfully negotiated the spreading of that additional wealth among those who produced it, and nonunion firms followed suit in order to ward off unionization efforts.

Today's reality is far different. Union rates in the private sector are at an abysmal 7 percent and 12 percent overall. This sharp decline also tracks the diversion of wealth, away from workers and to shareholders and top executives. In recent years, productivity has risen over median family income by a margin of eight to one. American workers have essentially stopped reaping the rewards of a growing economy. Without a union, they no longer have a seat at the table when decisions are made as to who gets what, and they have the crumbs to show for it.

Paul Krugman, a New York Times columnist who teaches economics at Princeton University, argues in his new book *The Conscience of a Liberal* that it is not the impersonal market forces of globalization and technological change that have stagnated Americans' living standards and caused income inequality to reach levels not seen since the age of the robber barons. It's a direct consequence of conscious decisions of government, driven by conservative Republicans, to cut taxes on wealth and undermine labor organizing.

Krugman points to Western Europe, which is subject to the same pressures from globalization and technology as the United States but has not experienced by any stretch the same rise in income inequality.

What this means is that to return to a time when it was really morning in America - not during Ronald Reagan's tenure when American workers were losing ground, but during the 1950s and 1960s - Democrats in power are going to have to get serious about helping to revitalize the union movement.

One of the craziest political strategies the Democratic Party ever adopted was to distance itself from labor - which it has since Walter Mondale in 1984 was painted as beholden to the AFL-CIO. Democratic political success is inextricably tied to the strength of the labor movement.

First, union members vote at an aggressive rate. Even as the percentage of union members drops, one in four voters belongs to a household with a union member in it, essentially the same percentage as existed in 1980.

Second, union members favor Democrats by two-digit margins. In 2004, when the rest of the country gave Democrats 48 percent of the popular vote, union member households gave them 59 percent.

When employees join unions they become more engaged citizens, more educated about their economic interests and more aware of which party will represent those interests.

Jobs like mine are becoming rarer these days, as the legacy of organized labor withers. In America today the rising tide is only lifting all yachts, while the dinghies founder - a trend that only a new government-labor partnership can begin to correct.

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Times Facts

Robyn joined the *Times* in 1997 as a columnist and member of the Editorial Board. Her weekly column appears in Sunday's Perspective section and is nationally syndicated by Tribune Media Services. Prior to joining the newspaper, Robyn wrote a semimonthly column on issues affecting civil rights and liberties, also for the Perspective section.

Talking Points

- Civil Liberties and Civil Rights Issues

Robyn has appeared on CNN, CBS News, *48 Hours*, National Public Radio and hundreds of local and national television, cable and radio shows.

Education

Blumner is a 1982 honors graduate of Cornell University's School of Industrial & Labor Relations in Ithaca, NY. where she received her B.S. in Industrial Relations. She received her J.D. degree from New York University School of Law in 1985 and was admitted to the New York State Bar in 1986.

Background

Robyn began her professional career as a legal associate in a New York law firm researching issues in corporate tax, bankruptcy, estate and labor law. She briefly worked as a ghostwriter for a labor arbitrator, and then joined the Staten Island Rapid Transit Operating Authority as Assistant Director of Labor Relations. In 1987 Robyn became Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Utah. She took over the directorship of the ACLU of Florida in 1987. As a side-line, in 1992 she began writing a monthly column on current events, social trends and civil rights with *XS Magazine* based in Ft. Lauderdale, FL. She joined the *Times* in 1997.

Awards

In 2001 Robyn received the Gardner Beckett Award by the Pinellas County ACLU chapter for outstanding work in the championing of civil liberties. She also received the BBSNews Editors Choice Award in 2001 given by BBSNews.com for excellence in political and social commentary. In 1996 Robyn was a finalist for the Mencken Award, given by the Free Press Association to a peer in recognition of outstanding writing in defense of individual liberty and in opposition to abuses of power.

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