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Christopher Fons

# The War in Madison

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Day five and six in Madison and momentum continues to build as finally Milwaukee Public School teachers, the largest district in the state, called in sick en masse and shut down the district. The nation has now been inspired by Wisconsinites as they put their jobs on the line to defend the right to collectively bargain for public employees.

<http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L400xH226/103639540-19121542-2-d65af.jpg>

Thursday's "strike" by the Democratic Senators – they hopped on a bus and decamped to Rockford, IL to deny quorum in the State Senate – showed that if the people act, the leaders will follow. The same phenomenon has occurred within the teachers' unions both in local unions and statewide. The leadership of both WEAC (Wisconsin Education Association Council) the state-wide organization and the largest local, MTEA (Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association), have grudgingly endorsed job actions after members took matters into their own hands and starting calling in on the second day of the demonstrations (Tuesday). In the case of WEAC, the leadership followed the lead of the Madison local MTI (Madison Teachers Incorporated), who went out on their own without any prodding from above. Madison Teachers and support staff stayed out all week and meet Sunday in a mass meeting to decide what to do Monday and the coming week. In Milwaukee one school took the lead on Tuesday and by Wednesday night the MTEA leadership had no choice but to endorse action, which led to a system-wide shut down by Friday.

35 smaller school districts across the state have also been closed or had opening times pushed back as teachers realized that now is the time to defend their collective bargaining rights.

Saturday morning broke with a crisp arctic cold but everyone in the movement was warmed by the realization we had now gone international. One picture in particular inspired us all: that of a young Egyptian man in Tahrir Square with a sign stating "Egypt Supports Wisconsin Workers: One World, One Pain."

By Wednesday MSNBC picked up the story and egofest was on as each of the liberal talking heads tried to position themselves as the savior of the people. Big Ed and Maddow showed they have a little fight in them as they recognized the historic nature of the moment but by the end of the week the Oprah like narratives emerged and for Maddow it was all about the Democratic Party. Even Ed knew this was baloney as he has rightly asked, again and again, where are the Democrats? Jesse Jackson showed up on Friday and seems to be the only national Democratic stalwart with any links to the popular movement left. Obama's comments were typically milktoast in an interview with a Milwaukee TV journalist stating it "seemed like" Walker was going out of his way to bust the union.

The buzz on Friday was a little ominous as talk of a mass Tea Party rally irritated the crowd. The local and national media salivated as visions of hippies in dreadlocks screaming at Joe the Plumber danced in their heads. Sarah Palin was rumored to be coming as she tweeted her "Union Brothers and Sisters" to come to Madison to support union busting Governor "Snot" Walker. But boy were they disappointed as "CHAOS IN MADISON" became 80,000 mild mannered middle of the road Midwesterners came to the capitol and packed the streets in an orderly fashion to show solidarity with the public sector workers of Wisconsin while a few befuddled white dudes told them they were making too much.

Even the Tea Party folk seemed quite humbled as their paltry numbers (a thousand or two?) were dwarfed by the mass of determination that encircled them. The goal of the organizers and police was to keep the two sides apart by dividing the capitol in half but because our crowd was so large this became an impossibility and the crowd, like the rank and file members of the unions across the state, created their own path and made history in Madison once again.

This week will be a test as many will be pressured to return to work and the renegade Senators tire of phone calls from Good Morning America.

Christopher Fons is a Social Studies teacher in Milwaukee and a member of the Milwaukee Teacher's Education Association (MTEA).

*Post-scriptum :*

*Christopher Fons is a Social Studies teacher in Milwaukee and a member of the Milwaukee Teacher's Education Association (MTEA).*

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