

BULLETIN

## NUPGE: Lessons from Wisconsin

February 28, 2011

Question ... what do the players of Super Bowl champs the Green Bay Packers have in common with Wisconsin teachers, social workers, nurses and state employees?

Answer ... all are rising up in protest to the union-busting antics of Governor Scott Walker (for more see [here](#)).

Walker has recently earned the nickname "Hosni" for his [announcement](#) that he is planning to strip the states public workers of collective bargaining rights and slash their wages and health benefits. And if these folks have the temerity to oppose "Hosni" Walkers edicts he will call in the Wisconsin National Guard (more background see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)).

Unsurprisingly, this has raised the ire of more than a few people in the state. An unusual voice against the Governor has been many of the players of the publicly/fan owned Green Bay Packers.

Players Brady Poppinga and Jason Spitz and former Packers Curtis Fuller, Chris Jacke, Charles Jordan, Bob Long and Steve Okoniewski have [stated that](#):

-in an unprecedented political attack Governor Walker is trying to take away their right to have a voice and bargain at work. The right to negotiate wages and benefits is a fundamental underpinning of our middle class...These public workers are Wisconsin's champions every single day and we urge the Governor and the State Legislature to not take away their rights."

But the Governor's attack shouldn't be a surprise to any of us. Indeed, the question has only been when and which jurisdiction in North America would be first to take such heavy handed action.

The private sector unions in Canada and the US have taken quite a beating over the past couple of decades. Sustained and prolonged attacks on these unions have seen significant decline in their size and influence.

Many in government and business think that the time is ripe to turn their sights on the public sector unions.

Why? We will undoubtedly hear a lot of blather about debts and deficits as well as general crapping on how "cushy" public sector workers supposedly have it. But that is just a cover for the real reason.

Ultimately it is that the rich and powerful don't like people standing up to them. Unions remain one of the strongest vehicles for change in the world. Able to connect to large numbers of people and speak out without fear of seeing their funding cut. Strikes threaten their beloved profits.

And unions speak out for everyone not just their members. We know that an injury to one is an injury to all!

The labour movement represents workplace and grassroots democracy at its best! Dictators know this when they ban unions. Workers know this when they face harassment and discrimination when trying to join them.

Fundamentally that is why the rich and powerful hate unions. It is also why we must continue to fight for our rights ... our labour rights.

It is for this reason that my union, the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE), has been arguing that Labour Rights are Human Rights for decades now.

Will the Canadian government or one of our provinces take a measure as extreme as Wisconsin's "Hosni Walker"? I hope not. But, to be candid, I think some will if they think they can get away with it.

That's why we must stand strong. Speak out. Mobilize.

Labour Rights Are Human Rights!

James Clancy, President

[National Union of Public and General Employees](#)

*HSA is a component of NUPGE*

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