

Madison teachers union agrees to deep concessions

By Jerry White
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Far from waging a struggle against Governor Walker's anti-worker law, Wisconsin unions have responded to the attack on collective bargaining rights by handing over even greater concessions in order to demonstrate their usefulness to state officials and big business.

Early Saturday morning, Madison Teachers Inc., the union representing 2,700 instructors and other school employees in the state capital, reached an agreement to extend the current contract with the school board. The agreement freezes wages and requires the same pension contributions that Walker is demanding from state workers. It also allows the district to require health insurance premium contributions up to 5 percent in 2011-12 and 10 percent in 2012-13.

According to the *Wisconsin State Journal*, the pension contribution will cost about \$3,200 this year for a Madison teacher earning the average salary of \$55,000. Five percent of a health insurance premium will cost another \$260 for a single person and \$700 for a family plan, an amount that will double in two years.

The union also agreed that teachers with unexcused absences due to four days of protests last month will have their pay docked and those whose excuses are found not to be valid will be suspended.

In return for the union's acceptance of these demands, the Madison school authorities are allowing the continued deduction of union dues from workers' paychecks—something Walker's bill prohibits but not until existing agreements expire. "If we feel we accomplished the things we needed to accomplish," School Superintendent Dan Nerad said, "there was no reason to do this work outside the context of collective bargaining."

Union officials are scrambling to find ways to collect dues now that Walker's bill has been passed into law.

The *Journal* reported, "Unions are looking at options, such as automatic bank transfers or credit card payments, for members to pay dues after employers are forbidden by the new law from collecting the money for the unions, said Paulette Feld, vice president of the state employees' union."

Union officials have warned that undermining the unions will lead to more opposition from workers. Quoting Feld again, the newspaper continued, "But she predicted workplaces will become less efficient and harder to manage without union leaders to explain rules to employees and act as a mediator between workers and managers."

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