

Labor Extension Bulletin

A Publication of the University of Massachusetts Labor Extension Program
 UMASS AMHERST ■ UMASS BOSTON ■ UMASS DARTMOUTH ■ UMASS LOWELL

VOLUME 13 ■ NUMBER 2 ■ SUMMER 2011

In Defense of Collective Bargaining

Republican Governors and legislators launched a spring offensive against public sector workers and their unions, looking to eliminate or severely curtail unions' rights to bargain and act on behalf of their members. The fight-back by workers, unions, students, farmers and others began in Wisconsin and spread to across the country—as did efforts to restrict our rights. Here in Massachusetts we are in the middle of a legislative attempt to eliminate collective bargaining over healthcare, a key term of employment, for municipal employees.

This assault on our hard-won rights is but the latest phase in a thirty-plus-year effort to make government a bad word (see Spotlight), demonize unions, particularly in the heavily unionized public sector, and other progressive groups, and slash taxes for corporations and the wealthy. All of this has been done in the name of free—as in unrestricted and unregulated—markets, and a philosophy known worldwide as Neoliberalism.

Coupled with the most severe economic recession since the Great Depression, states and municipalities are crying poverty and public sector workers and their unions are targeted as the cause of our troubles.

The Massachusetts effort makes the same economic necessity claim. Municipalities are broke and healthcare costs are spiraling out of control. Unionized workers have health benefits that should be the standard for the rest of Massachusetts workers. Municipal workers are being told that they not only must give back, but they

have to give up—give up their right to bargain over changes in a basic component of their wages.

Our friends in the legislature abandoned us on this issue, with some notable exceptions. They told us that health care cost savings could only happen by legislative fiat and that moving municipal employees into the state-sponsored GIC would be a good deal and would match what is provided to state workers. While solutions to

spiraling health care costs and decreased public revenues require broader policy changes, such as single payer health care, and tax reform (see Labor Extension Bulletin Winter 2011) collective bargaining remains the best promise for crafting a solution that works for both parties.

We know that collective bargaining works. Here's what Chicopee mayor, Mike Bissonnette had to say about Chicopee's efforts to contain healthcare costs in an email



to the Pioneer Valley labor movement: *"Thought you might be interested to know that in Chicopee, we still do things the old fashioned way. We sit down and bargain. Yes, that's right—we actually negotiate!"* Bissonnette went on to describe the sophisticated and fair compromise healthcare plan that saves Chicopee a bundle on health care costs and returns much of that savings to municipal workers. The Mayor concludes by saying *"Chicopee shows that responsible public employers and reasonable public employees can come together for a win-win solution!"*

Around THE STATE

Organizers' Roundtable

Second Tuesday of the month, 9:30-11:30 am

Cost: Free

Location: IBEW Local 103

Contact: Bill Corley, 617-436-3710, John Drinkwater, MA AFL-CIO, 781-423-8230

Roundtable discussions on topics of interest to union organizers

36th Annual UALE Northeast Regional Summer School for Union Women

Sunday through Friday, July 17-22

Cost: \$580/person for double, \$675/person for single

Location: Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ

Contact: Dale Melcher, 413-545-6166 or dmelcher@lrrc.umass.edu

Theme: Fired Up for Change! Commemorating the 100th

Anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

This five-day program brings together union women who are rank-and-file members, staff and officers to strengthen their knowledge of the American labor movement, understand its present challenges and issues, and develop skills that will prepare them to be more active union members and leaders.

The Center for Popular Economics 2011 Summer Institute

Sunday through Saturday, July 24-30

Cost: see http://www.populareconomics.org/Summer_Institute_2011.html for details and a downloadable application.

Location: Smith College, Northampton, MA

Contact: Emily Kawano, 413-545-0743 or programs@populareconomics.org

Theme: Media, Democracy and the Economy.

This week-long intensive training in economics is for activists, educators, and anyone who wants a better understanding of economics. Trainings are participatory and build on the knowledge and experience of participants. You don't need a background in economics to participate!

Defending the Public Sector: Looking at the Impact of Race and Class and Forming Strategy for the Fight-back

Saturday, September 10, 9am – 2pm

Cost: \$10.00, lunch included

Location: UMass Dartmouth Woodland Commons

Contact: Kim Wilson, 508-999-8781

Join trade unionist from across the state to examine the economic and social conditions that have led to the current crisis and work together to formulate a strategy for fighting back.

Future of Work: What's Labor's Agenda for Economic Development?

Thursday evening and Friday, September 22 and 23

Cost: Free with pre-registration

Location: Campus Center, UMass Amherst

Contact: Dale Melcher, 413-545-6166 or dmelcher@lrrc.umass.edu

This conference will bring together labor leaders, community activists and researchers and academics to examine an economic agenda for the labor movement. We will examine some interesting projects from Massachusetts and beyond, such as labor involvement in worker coops, high-road manufacturing strategies and building sustainable and green, and consider how to deepen labor's involvement in economic planning and development in the Commonwealth.

The Future of Labor Organizing in Higher Education National Conference

Friday, Sept. 30 – Saturday, Oct. 1

Cost: \$160 early registration; \$220 after August 1

Location: UMass Boston

Contact: Anneta Argyres, 617-287-7229

SEIU Local 615 and The Labor Resource Center invite you to join us for a national conference on the changing nature of the higher education industry and its impacts on union organizing in the US and internationally.

The Resource Corner

Many of the online sites listed in recent *Bulletins* are resources regarding collective bargaining. See the Economic Policy Institute, www.epi.org, the United Association for Labor Education, www.UALE.org, and Demos, www.demos.org, especially the *Revitalizing Government section*.

For statements in support of the right to bargain collectively from various faiths, download *What Faith Groups Say About the Right to Organize* from Working Partnerships USA at www.wpusa.org/Interfaith-Council/Resource.htm.

See *States of Denial* at the AFL-CIO, www.afl-cio.org, for news and resources about current attacks on unionism in various states, as well as fight-back stories.

Many individual unions, especially public sector unions, have timely news about the attacks on unions around the country and stories and resources for fighting back. AFSCME, www.afscme.org, special section dedicated to defending public sector union bargaining rights, *Stop the Lies*, includes videos, news, fact sheets and a sign-on campaign

The Fire Fighters, www.IAFF.org, have an interactive *State Attacks map* (Click on *IAFF Fighting Back Campaign*) with state-by-state information on current proposed anti-union legislation.

Finally, see two great Facebook pages: *Public Sector Workers are not the Problem* and *Save Collective Bargaining*. (This latter is mostly about New Jersey, but includes broader posts.)

Program Notes

■ UMASS AMHERST

The attack on public sector unions which began in Wisconsin and spread across the country triggered rallies and a teach-in here at UMass Amherst. For a video of our presentation *Why Unions Are in the Cross-Hairs* (and the accompanying power point) see: http://umasswtf.com/wordpress/?page_id=26 and scroll down to Dale Melcher. We offered several workshops on defending the public sector, with a focus on framing and delivering our pro-union, pro-public sector message to our members and the public. A training highlight has been a series of hour-long presentations before the monthly membership meetings of the Northampton firefighters union (IAFF 108). We continued working with the Hampshire Franklin and Pioneer Valley labor councils and participated in organizing and observing Workers Memorial Day in Northampton and teaching at the PV AFL-CIO's annual education conference. Finally we've planned and prepared to teach at the WILD Summer Institute and the NE Regional Summer School for Union Women.

■ UMASS BOSTON

This winter, the LRC piloted our new "Winter Workshop Series" with three workshops on the general theme of "Laboring for a Worldwide Social Justice Movement". This series was open to both labor studies students and the general public. All three workshops engendered great discussions and were enjoyed by all participants, so we will definitely continue this program. Look in our next issue for an announcement of next winter's series. As we go to press, the LRC will be hosting the next in our series of semiannual breakfast seminars called "Thinking Big/Moving Forward". This spring's event, "Fighting Back: An Analysis of the Pro-Public Sector Campaign in Ohio" will feature reports from SEIU 1199 members Keri Rodrigues and Ray Drewnowski who went to Ohio to join the fight.

■ UMASS DARTMOUTH

The UMD LEP has been very active working with the Amalgamated Transit Union, Fall River and New Bedford locals. People First, a labor-community organization led by UMD Labor Extension, will supervise a summer intern working on local transit justice issues. We are completing our multi-year worker photography project with a grand opening gallery show and a commemorative poster. Finally, we are holding a conference on the crisis facing public sector workers on September 10. A keynote speaker of national stature will address the impact of the attacks on the public sector, especially as it affects women and people of color. Strategies for survival and moving forward will be addressed. Workshops on changing the media message around public sector workers and addressing the social and economic conditions leading to the crisis and possible responses will be offered. The conference will end with a panel on local issues with a focus on public education. For more information, contact Kim Wilson at 508-999-8781 or kwilson@umassd.edu.

■ UMASS LOWELL

We have focused on three major initiatives during the fall. The proposal for a new interdisciplinary minor at UMass Lowell, *Work, Labor and Society*, was completed and submitted to the first committee in the approval process. We anticipate that it will be approved and the first session of the new core course *Work, Labor and Society* will be offered in fall 2011. A key part of the new minor will be service learning projects and internships with labor councils, unions and community organizations in the area. We will be developing that work during the spring. We are also working with the North Shore Labor Council on an exciting new project, the "New Lynn" regional power building project, providing training and support work with the developing coalition. And we continue to work with the Bread and Roses Centennial committee, which recently held a large community kick off meeting on Jan. 15th, 99 years after the start of the strike.

S P O T L I G H T

Governmentisgood.com

Why a website defending government? Here's what Doug Amy, Mt. Holyoke College professor of politics and creator of Governmentisgood.com, has to say on the home page of this excellent resource:

"Like many Americans, I am tired of the government bashing that is constantly coming from the political right. For decades conservatives have been demonizing government and not enough has been done to defend it. Ever since Ronald Reagan declared in 1981 that "Government is not a solution to our problem, government is the problem," Republicans have been waging a political war against this institution...

Blithely ignoring anything good about government, conservatives have conducted a relentless smear campaign against this institution, portraying it as wasteful, ineffective, corrupt, oppressive, and bad for business. And wherever they have been in power, Republican officials have pursued an anti-government agenda of slashing taxes, cutting social programs, and rolling back regulations.

This website is a response to this one-sided, distorted, and misleading depiction of government. It makes the case that government – despite its flaws – plays a valuable and indispensable role in promoting the public good."

There are links to other sources, as well as articles by Amy in sections on *The War on Government*, *Why Government Is Good*, and *Revitalizing Democracy and Government*.



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UMass Amherst

Labor Extension Program

Labor Center, Thompson Hall

200 Hicks Way

Amherst, MA 01003-9277

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In the Past 4 months...

The UMass Labor Extension Program Has Provided Trainings On These Topics...

- **Advanced Popular Education**
WILD
- **Basic Unionism**
Mass Justice United/ NOLSW/UAW 2320
- **Building Diversity into our Work**
GEO/UAW 2322
- **Building Support for the Public Sector:
Re-framing the Debate**
United Association for Labor Education (UALE)
Conference
WILD in the Winter East and West
- **Creating Good Jobs**
PV AFL-CIO Education Conference
- **Creating New Knowledge and Leaders
for Movement Building: How Popular
Education Works**
UALE Conference
- **Exclusion or Solidarity: Exploring the
Legacy of Labors' Response to Racism**
UALE Conference

To Contact the UMass Labor Extension Program:

■ UMass Amherst Labor Extension Program

Labor Center, Thompson Hall, 200 Hicks Way
Amherst, MA 01003-9277

Dale Melcher: 413-545-6166 Fax: 413-545-0110
email: dmelcher@lrrc.umass.edu

■ UMass Boston Labor Extension Program

CPCS Labor Resource Center, 100 Morrissey Blvd.
Boston, MA 02125-3393

Tess Ewing: 617-287-7352
email: tess.ewing@umb.edu

■ UMass Dartmouth Labor Extension Program

Dubin Labor Education Center, 285 Old Westport Road
North Dartmouth, MA 02747

Kim Wilson: 508-999-8781 Fax: 508-999-9168
email: kwilson@umassd.edu

■ UMass Lowell Labor Extension Program

600 Suffolk St., 5th Floor, Lowell, MA 01854

Susan Winning: 978-934-3127 Fax: 978-934-4033
email: susan_winning@uml.edu

- **Gender Issues in Labor History**
Rhode Island Jobs with Justice Solidarity
School
- **Internal Organizing and Developing a
Campaign**
SEIU New England Region Staff
- **Peter's Patterns (class on labor for sec-
ond graders)**
Cambridge Friends' School
- **Popular Education for Safety and Health
Trainers**
MA Division of Occupational Safety
- **Servicios Públicos para Nuestras
Comunidades** (Public Services for our
Communities)
WILD in the Winter East
- **Strategic Planning Power Analysis**
The People First Transportation Project
- **The Boss Can't Do That, Can He?
Helping ESOL and ABE Students Advocate for
Their Rights at Work**
Boston SABES
- **The Political Economy of Race**
CPCS, UMass Boston
- **Understanding Wisconsin: Why Unions?**
IAFF 108
- **Weingarten and Garry Rights and Workload
Issues**
SEIU 509 DOR Chapter Board
- **What's Going on with the Economy & What
Can We Do?**
New Lynn Coalition
- **Why Unions Are in the Cross-Hairs**
UMass Amherst Where's The Funding Teach-in
- **Your Rights as Union Members**
IAFF 108