

AFSCME Corrections United

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FROM THE OFFICERS

The Assault on Our Basic Rights

Anti-union, anti-worker legislatures and governors in many states are on a war path. They are attacking hard-working public service workers, claiming they are to blame for the budget crises in municipalities and states.

On March 9, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker (R) signed a union-busting bill, which his Republican allies rammed through the Legislature, stripping corrections officers, bus drivers, nurses, teachers and EMTs of their collective bargaining rights. But at press time, Dane County Circuit Judge Maryann

Sume issued a temporary restraining order blocking the law from taking effect. Walker had warned that he would consider using “every legal means” to weaken unions, including a threat to call out the National Guard to staff the prisons if necessary. President Obama correctly described Walker’s brazen move as “an assault on unions.”

At a time when we should pull together to create jobs, Walker – and other governors like him – is more interested in tearing the nation



Gerald W. McEntee
International President



Lee A. Saunders
International Secretary-Treasurer

apart by attacking unions and the middle class.

Currently, there are pending bills against public employee collective bargaining rights in Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Tennessee and Washington. These bills would strip public service workers of their right to bargain for fair wages and decent benefits.

These legislators and governors, and the folks who put them in office, are mainly responsible for the economy’s collapse. These anti-worker forces also use state budget shortfalls as an excuse to privatize state services, like corrections, shifting core responsibilities to companies that are motivated by profit, not service. In Ohio, for instance, state legislators are eager to turn over half of the state’s corrections facilities to privateers.

Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad (R) is considering proposals that would remove the terms of health insurance from bargaining and eliminate the obligation of an arbitrator to consider past contracts. Ohio Gov. John Kasich (R) has long made ending public sec-

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AFSCME corrections officers in Wisconsin join thousands of workers at the state Capitol in February to protest Republican Gov. Scott Walker’s plan to end collective bargaining.

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Photo: Joe Weidner

Verneta Clark, a member of AFSCME Ohio Retiree Chapter 1184, and the first female employee at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville, joined her sisters and brothers at the Statehouse rally on Feb. 22.

tor collective bargaining a priority. He has threatened to fire striking public service workers and do away with binding arbitration. In March, Kasich signed S.B. 5, which would eliminate collective bargaining for state workers.

Right-to-work laws – designed to weaken unions – are currently being considered in Alaska, Connecticut, Hawaii, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, New

Mexico, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Washington and West Virginia. These measures, now in effect in 22 states, undermine wages for all workers and destroy the best job security protection that exists: the union contract. Under these laws, workers in unionized settings would benefit from the union's victories without sharing in the cost of running the union.

Now is the time to fight back like never before. We have already started a campaign to recall eight GOP senators in Wisconsin and hold them accountable at the ballot box.

But Wisconsin is only the beginning. We're in this fight for the long haul. The attack against public service workers — wherever our sisters and brothers are threatened — is an attack against AFSCME members everywhere. Visit afscme.org, to find out how you can join the fight.

We've got to mobilize the power that comes from speaking with one clear voice. Each of us must be fully engaged in a unified effort for the good of every AFSCME member, for the good of working families and the good of our nation. ●



Photo: Greg Dixon

Marching in front of the state Capitol in Madison, AFSCME corrections officers wave to cheering supporters.

Kentucky COs Gain Rights

Approximately 5,000 Kentucky corrections officers and employees who work in prisons and related facilities (AFSCME Council 62) have finally won their first union agreement with the state. During a time when governors across the country work to eliminate collective bargaining rights, the victory is particularly important.

The agreement, signed recently by Gov. Steve Beshear (D), is even more significant because Kentucky state

workers do not currently have the collective bargaining rights, which allow workers to negotiate wages, benefits and working conditions. Now, at least, those workers covered by the agreement will be represented by a union steward in grievance procedures, and in meetings with management that could lead to disciplinary actions.

The agreement also establishes a new labor-management process allowing workers to bring up issues and con-

cerns outside the grievance procedures. Meetings between COs and the warden of the Kentucky State Penitentiary have already resulted in concrete solutions to safety problems, such as the purchase of radios and other equipment, and improvements to the telephone system.

David Warrick, executive director of Council 62 and an International vice president, commended the governor for his strong support of collective bargaining: "This is a tremendous step

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State Workers are Taxpayers, Too! *by Thomas Bradfield*

Photo: Charlie Wishman



I've never had my head bashed with a mailbox or trash can. I've never been stabbed or punched so hard that it required several surgeries to repair the damage. But many of my co-workers have.

Every morning, men and women in Iowa walk into a workplace and wonder if they'll be going home that night. Danger stalks them even after they leave. Many have ended up divorced or consumed by addictions because of stress. Faced with constant threats, they always walk with a guarded eye.

Their stories seldom make front-page headlines because "What happens on the mile, stays on the mile." It comes with the territory.

These are the officers of the Iowa Department of Corrections. They perform a public service many cannot. They place their lives on the line to ensure that the citizens of Iowa are safe.

The people's interests are always on our minds when we negotiate a contract. This past year alone, we voted to open up contracts to accept a week of mandatory unpaid days and the temporary elimination of deferred compensation allotments due to the budget crisis. This is unheard of.

Yet, state employees continue to be

used as scapegoats by politicians who blame us for problems we have no control over. They begrudge us a 2 percent raise in salary and affordable health care. You'd think that's the least they can do for the men and women who risk their lives every day.

These are the workers of Iowa who proudly serve the public on the front lines. Do not punish them for they are taxpayers, too. ●

Bradfield is a corrections officer at the Mt. Pleasant Correctional Facility in Iowa, and a member of Local 2985 (Iowa Council 61). Reprinted from www.press-citizen.com, Jan. 29, 2011

Unions Care About Ohio *by Gary Shepherd*

Photo: OCSEA Comm. Dept.



For 13 years, I've been a hard-working state employee in the Dept. of Rehabilitation and Corrections. I know that one

of the biggest sacrifices of working in the public sector is the compromise and give-and-take involved.

State employees' ability to compromise in hard times hasn't wavered. In

24 years of collective bargaining, we've negotiated for better wages and benefits and other issues like health and safety. We've never taken a strike vote. We've only used binding arbitration or "conciliation" once and, when we did, the arbitrator did not go our way.

My union has stood side-by-side with the state of Ohio for decades working to find solutions to the state's economic problems. Our latest contract saved the state \$250 million. We've achieved hundreds of millions in sav-

ings due to joint quality initiatives, a shared approach to administrative services and a collaborative approach to keeping health care costs in line.

My union cares about Ohio and so do I. That's why I'm proud to come to work every day. ●

*Shepherd is a corrections officer in Portsmouth, Ohio, and a member of Local 7330, Ohio Civil Service Employees Association (OCSEA). Reprinted from *Portsmouth Daily Times*, Jan. 15, 2011*

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in building a strong union," Warrick said. "As state employees, we now have written rules and rights that cannot be changed unilaterally on any given day at the whim of management. This agreement lays a solid foundation for expanding those rights for years to come."

Adds Derrick Lloyd, a CO at the Kentucky State Penitentiary and a member of Local 752, Council 62, "This

agreement is very important to us," he explains. "It's not just the representation that matters. But with a voice at work, we now have a measure of power to improve the lives of our members who make great sacrifices every day on the job."

The agreement also covers some 4,000 social service employees, including family case workers and managers and social workers. ●



Photo: Jon Melegrito

Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear (D) signs two negotiated union agreements covering approximately 9,000 corrections and social service workers.

Pushing Back the Privateers

Photo: Jan Underwood/DaytonDailyNews



Corrections officers from Ohio's Dayton Correctional Institution call their state representatives to protest Senate Bill 269, which would privatize half of the state's prisons.

Like corrections officers and other public service workers across the nation, Ohio COs are in for a fight.

With two of 31 state-owned facilities currently in private hands, Sen. Timothy Grendell (R-Chesterland) introduced a bill last year that would privatize at least 13 more prisons. Although the bill died in committee, Grendell is likely to bring it back again.

When John Kasich won the governor's seat last November, the situation got worse. He vowed to target the prison system as a way to save money. In his two-year budget submitted in March, he proposed selling off five state prisons to

raise \$200 million.

Kasich has chosen a former official of Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) to run the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections. He has also threatened to do away with binding arbitration and fire public service workers who go on strike.

But Ohio's COs are fighting back, not only against privatization but also against attempts to end collective bargaining. They're taking on the governor and his cronies, attending a series of protest rallies and actions, testifying at hearings and lobbying the state Legislature.

Last year, when Grendell filed his bill,

S.B. 269, COs flooded state legislators' offices with phone calls to protest what they denounced as a "reckless plan." Joined by other members of the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association (OCSEA), COs pushed back, mobilizing more than 3,000 members to write letters urging their representatives to stand up against the private prison plan. "We will fight this with every resource we have," said OCSEA Pres. Eddie Parks who is also an International vice president. "At a time when Ohioans are already hurting from the loss of the state's manufacturing base, it's the wrong time to eliminate good paying jobs and replace them with lower wage work."

Among those who led a massive corrections call-in day was Joanie Hunter, Chapter 5725 president of the Dayton Correctional Institution and a member of OCSEA. "Private prisons are not held to the same standards as a publicly-run institution, so it would be devastating to our community," she said. "For-profit prisons diminish safety because they have higher turnover rates and decreased training as a result of the corner cutting that comes with profit making."

She adds: "Legislators who were pushing for privatization failed to prove that it would save costs. The two prisons already in private hands are not saving the state any money at all." ●

No-layoff Agreement Ratified

AFSCME COs at Illinois' Sheridan Correctional Center, who had gone through a facility closure and a long battle to get the prison re-opened, voted overwhelmingly for a new agreement with the state that will bar layoffs and facility closures through June 30, 2012.

The union and management agreed that some \$20 million in savings could be achieved by adopting some of the operational efficiencies submitted by employees, such as improving operations in Corrections Industries and making energy-efficiency modifications at corrections facilities.

"We have forged a groundbreaking agreement that offers protection against job loss for AFSCME members in state government," says Council 31 Exec. Dir. Henry Bayer, also an International vice president. "Later next year, we will get

Photo: Council 31



down to work on a new collective bargaining agreement in one of the worst economic climates in which our negotiations have ever taken place." ●

Corrections Union Elects First Woman President

State Corrections Officer Lisamarie Fontano has become the first woman to head a Council 4 AFSCME corrections union since state employees gained collective bargaining rights in 1978.

Fontano, 39, was elected recently by members of Local 387 – a part of Council 4’s 5,000-member NP-4 corrections bargaining unit – which represents nearly 800 COs and prison employees at the Cheshire Correctional Complex. The state facility includes Cheshire Correctional Institution and Manson Youth Institution.

“I understand the significance of my election, but I never looked at this as a gender issue,” Fontano says. “We’re all on the frontlines, walking the most dangerous beat in Connecticut.”

Fontano has worked for the Department of Corrections for more than 17 years. She has served on the union’s executive board and on the negotiating teams. An activist who enjoys grassroots political action, Fontano has testified in the state Legislature on numerous issues, including compensation benefits for workers



Photo: Larry Dorman

Lisamarie Fontano

who perform hazardous duty.

“Safety is always a huge challenge for us,” Fontano explains. “It’s our job to protect the safety and well-being of our institutions and the public, and to ensure that workers who provide these vital services are safe as well.”

Fontano says it’s important for the public and elected officials to understand the challenges faced by prison workers on and off the job. “We do positive things every day that the public is not aware of,” she adds. “At the same time, people need to understand the stress and the dangers inherent in our jobs. Nationally, the average life expectancy of a corrections officer is 58 years. We have a high divorce rate, more long-term illnesses and injury issues. People don’t want to talk about that.”

Married and the mother of three young children, Fontano admits that she’s “excited and nervous at the same time,” about her leadership role. “I’d like to think I’m setting a good example for my children and the people who will walk the beat after me. You should never be afraid or intimidated if you believe in something.” ●

Tennessee COs Win Seniority Bidding

More than 400 corrections officers and employees at the Morgan County Correctional Complex in Wartburg – members of AFSCME Local 2173 – are hailing a recent agreement which provides seniority bidding in all areas of the facility. The state instructed Commissioner Gayle Ray of the Tennessee Department of Corrections (DOC) to sign the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), despite objections of the former warden who was promoted to deputy commissioner this year.

The agreement means COs and employees may now choose their preferred work shifts, days off and job assignments according to tenure.

“It’s all about getting a fair shake and having dignity on the job,” says Local

2173 Pres. Bill Shillings. “We were operating under no such agreement after we moved from the Brushy Mountain prison, which was shut down more than a year ago.”

But fighting for the MOU wasn’t easy. “The former warden wanted to bust our union and he kept stalling and spreading unfavorable statements about us,” recalls Shillings. “And with the mid-term elections coming up, we couldn’t wait any longer and allow a hostile Legislature to stop us. So we flexed our political muscle and went to battle.”

Local members phoned and visited state representatives – mostly members of the Democratic Caucus – who then pressured the DOC to act promptly.

As it turned out, Local 2173 timed it perfectly. The Nov. 2 elections returned

the Statehouse to the Republicans, who also now control both chambers of the Legislature.

“We’re the only union in state government that was offered an MOU,” Shillings says proudly. “That’s because we’ve had a long history of fighting and winning.”

Since the 1970s, Local 2173 has waged a tenacious battle against privatization attempts. After moving to their new facility, the COs won a major victory when Gov. Phil Bredesen (D) issued an order directing all new employees to be state workers. They have since increased the bargaining unit to 410 members, or 99 percent of the total workforce – a remarkable feat considering that Tennessee is a right-to-work state. ●

A Great Day for Maryland COs

In the midst of assaults against public service workers across the nation, corrections officers in Maryland have made some gains. They have defeated a 12-hour-shift proposal, reduced discipline assignments for more than 100 COs, reinstated roll call pay and won stab-proof vests on the job. Last year, they scored a big win in the Maryland General Assembly. Legislators passed the Correctional Officers Bill of Rights (COBOR), which provides better due process rights for COs when they are suspected of wrongdoing.

Recently, they ratified a new union contract providing new raises and effectively ending furloughs. COs and thousands of other state workers are hailing the new agreement for protecting vital public services for Maryland citizens.

“We have proven once again what power and strength in numbers can do,” says Laura Blankenship, a CO at the Maryland Correctional Institution in Jessup and a member of Local 1678 (AFSCME Maryland). “This is a great win for my fellow COs and state co-workers who have been working hard to build the strongest union possible since we first achieved collective bar-

gaining rights in 1997. We are now in a good position to build on this contract, ensure better working conditions and secure a better future for our families.”

The new agreement protects Maryland’s public service workers from furloughs through the life of the contract, from 2011 to 2014. As a result, salaries will go back up to pre-furlough levels and every state worker will receive a \$750 bonus, starting July 1, 2011.

During the past three years, 3,500 state worker positions have been cut while employees have been forced to cope with furloughs, short staffing and increased caseloads. This new contract is a welcome relief for the front-line workers serving the people of Maryland.

The agreement also provides a 2 percent salary increase, effective Jan. 1, 2013, and a 3 percent raise, effective Jan. 1, 2014, as long as the state hits projected revenue levels. In addition, workers will receive a one salary-grade step increase as of April 1, 2014.

While Maryland will continue to close certain state facilities on five pre-determined days to save money in 2012 through 2014, state workers will still be paid for those closed days. Furthermore,

employees at those facilities will also receive five days of administrative leave that can be used any time prior to the employee’s separation from state service.

The contract also includes a fair share provision that all workers who are covered under the agreement pay for representation. More than half the workers who voted are not currently members. They endorsed the agreement and the idea that everyone should provide their fair share of resources to strengthen the union.

“By voting in favor of our contract, state employees have spoken loudly and clearly,” said AFSCME Maryland Exec. Dir. Patrick Moran. “This sends a powerful message that we are united and deserve respect for the vital public services we provide that make Maryland happen. Now we have greater resources to win upcoming fights in the Legislature, such as defeating unfair efforts to slash our hard-earned pensions.”

Adds Rick Thomas, a CO and a member of the negotiating team: “AFSCME members worked hard to get the public on our side. Once again, when we fight together, we win!” ●



Photo: Jeff Pittman

Maryland public service workers, including corrections officers, vote to ratify a strong contract that puts an end to furloughs and paves the way for wage increases.

Jail Break Reignites Debate About Private Prisons

The brazen escape last July of three dangerous criminals from a private jail in Arizona, and the murder of two innocent victims – allegedly by one of the escapees – have revived public criticism that private facilities are more prone to security breaches because of mismanagement.

AFSCME has said for years that the cost-cutting measures of these for-profit firms waste taxpayers' money and jeopardize public safety. Critics of privatized prisons agree – pointing to the breakout and the tragedy that followed – making it the state's worst in 30 years.

Operated by Utah-based Management & Training Corporation (MTC), the jail in Kingman has had security problems since it opened seven years ago. For instance, a faulty alarm system gave false signals so frequently that guards simply ignored them.

It was a jailbreak waiting to happen.

No one was surprised when it finally did. The inmates cut their way through a prison fence after an accomplice threw tools into the prison yard, allowing them to sneak out undetected. The escape sparked a three-week nationwide man hunt for the dangerous criminals who were eventually caught, but not soon enough to prevent the murder of a vacationing couple in New Mexico.

The jailbreak and the tragic deaths stirred a public outcry and much handwringing among state officials. Then-Atty. Gen. Terry Goddard chastised Gov. Jane Brewer (R), a fan of private contractors, for creating a "climate of permissiveness" in private prisons. MTC "clearly breached the public trust," he said.

Department of Corrections Dir. Charles Ryan, citing "lack of confidence" in MTC, ordered an investigation. The report revealed several deficiencies at

MTC, including poor staff training, high turnover, lack of control of inmates and malfunctioning sensors. The report also noted areas of non-compliance in the prison's security system and concluded that many serious problems went unaddressed. "The reason the men were able to escape is rooted in a culture of complacency," Ryan said.

MTC was forced to make fixes, but six months after the escape Arizona officials were still so dissatisfied that they threatened to cancel MTC's contract. The state also cancelled an initial request for 5,000 more private prison beds after the Legislature's top supporter of private prisons, Rep. John Kavanagh (R), said the existing state-run complexes should remain public, not be turned private as the state has tried to do.

Arizona presently houses 20 percent of the state's 40,000 inmates in private prisons. ●

NEWS BRIEFS

VETERANS BENEFITS.

For more than a year, the Veterans Initiative of Minnesota Council 5's Corrections Policy Committee has been raising funds to benefit residents of the state's five veterans homes. Through candy bar sales and direct donations, the committee has collected \$18,000 of the \$25,000 they hope to have by this fall.

Meanwhile, corrections officers at Lino Lakes (Local 2728, Minnesota Council 5) have "adopted" the family of Desert Storm veteran Nicole Groschen. Her husband, Chad, was recently diagnosed with inoperable cancer. The COs have donated \$550 in gifts and cash.

AGILITY TESTING.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice has adopted a training program to enhance the professionalism of the agency's cadre of 26,000 corrections officers who are on the frontlines of the state's 112 prisons.

AFSCME Council 7 Exec. Dir. Brian Olsen, a former CO, applauds the physical test, which involves push-ups, sit-ups and deep squats. "It's essential that COs have the physical agility to climb ladders and walk down hallways so they can function more effectively on the job," he says.

MEDAL OF HONOR.

Michael Whitehead, a CO at the Connecticut maximum-security prison in Somers and a member of Local 387, Council 4, received the Medal of Valor recently, following an incident where he risked his life to save another corrections officer. With "no regard for his own safety," Whitehead jumped in front of an inmate who was assaulting his co-worker, preventing what could have been a potentially fatal injury.

IN MEMORIAM.

AFSCME mourns the loss of corrections officer Gary Chapin who died last November in the line of duty. Chapin, 49, of the Crawford County Correctional Facility in Pennsylvania, and a member of Local 2643, District Council 85, was stabbed by an inmate who was being handcuffed. Chapin had been a CO at the facility for more than four years. He was married with two teenage children.



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Senate Republicans Block Bargaining Rights Bill

After corrections officers successfully lobbied the U.S. House of Representatives last July to approve the Public Safety Employer Employee Cooperation Act (PSEECA), they mounted a similar effort in the Senate.

But with mid-term elections approaching, Senate leaders were not able to bring the bill to a vote until the lame-duck session in December.

GOP electoral victories from across the nation emboldened Senate Republicans and blocked the measure from being considered. The 55 to 43 vote fell short of the 60 needed to proceed. Business groups and state and municipal officials who opposed the bill argued that it would lead to budget shortfalls in many localities.

"It is disappointing and very frustrating," says CO Ronald Bratsch of Nevada. "We've worked so hard for so long to push Congress to stand with us

on this issue. Public safety officers in at least 20 states don't have bargaining rights right now. Political leaders who failed us will be held accountable."

Adds Ken Corzine, also a CO from Nevada: "Collective bargaining is still the only way we can sit equally at the table and improve our working conditions. But we're in for a tough fight. Anti-worker forces across the country are threatening to privatize state prisons, take away our bargaining rights and push through right-to-work laws instead."

"We will not give up," declares CO Ricco DiPietro of Louisiana, one of the right-to-work states. "COs want the same rights and benefits that everyone else has." A member of the ACU National Steering Committee, DiPietro vows to continue this fight until the collective bargaining bill becomes law. ●

SAVE THE DATE!



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*Information and registration forms
will be available soon at afscme.org.*