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# On Wisconsin

Heidi Schlumpf | Feb. 22, 2011 NCR Today

I am a Wisconsin native. I cheer for the Packers, love cheese (and have been known to wear it on my head) and say "a-boat" for "about." So I've been watching the events in Madison very closely and prayerfully.

I am also the daughter of two teachers--both now happily and securely retired, thanks at least in part to their union. They never made a lot of money, but they had good benefits, again thanks to their union.

And while I know plenty of folks in Wisconsin who supported Republican Gov. Scott Walker--and continue to do so--I have been gratified to see so many non-teachers and other non-government workers outraged at the governor and Republican lawmakers who want to take away collective bargaining rights from employees who are willing to make other concessions. It's union busting, plain and simple.

I've also been proud to see the Catholic Church (in the form of Wisconsin bishops [1]) support workers' right to organize--a longtime Catholic teaching.

But I've also been scratching my head at those who think that teachers, social workers, nurses and other public workers should be "brought down" to the same level as workers in the public sector who have had to accept wage cuts and increases in their contributions to their health insurance and retirement plans. Seems we've all accepted this as the "new normal," and many are resentful that others haven't had to suffer like they have. Wouldn't it be better if at least *some* workers maintained the advantages unions worked for--in the hope that *all* workers might get these back some day?

I've also been saddened at the level of animosity some people have for teachers, precisely because they have job security and other protections. Sure, there are bad teachers out there--just as there are in any profession (even other unionized ones, like pilots. And bad ones can be fired.)

I'll also concede that some unions have become too powerful and abused that power. But management and the wealthy in our society (most of whom supported Walker) still have the majority of the power and are more likely to misuse it, as Paul Krugman persuasively argued in his column [2]yesterday.

So why do people still tend to blame those below them for all the ills of society--rather than those above them, who have the real power? I've been thinking about this and can only conclude that this is evidence of the deep classism in our culture. Which, like all the other "isms" (sexism, racism), is a sin.

I hope to get to Madison before this is all over, though I pray for a resolution before I can make the trip. This is a labor dispute and a political issue, to be sure. But it is also a spiritual one.

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