

An appeal to the UAW and the Michigan AFL-CIO

Beat back “right-to-work”

Yes, WE CAN!

The attack on unions by Michigan’s governor and legislature is a declaration of war on the rights of poor and working people. Rallies alone won’t do. Wisconsin showed that even temporary occupations of the Capitol aren’t enough. This latest assault must be met with decisive action by organized labor and our allies.

The UAW Constitution gives us a weapon that can be used to fight and win. Article 50, Sec. 8 says:

“In case of great emergency, when the existence of the International Union is involved, together with the economic and social standing of our membership, the International President and the International Executive Board shall have the authority to declare a general strike within the industry by a 2/3 vote of the International Executive Board, whenever in their good judgment it shall be deemed proper for the purpose of preserving and perpetuating the rights and living standards of the general membership ... provided, under no circumstances shall it call such a strike until approved by a referendum vote of the membership.”

The union busting “Right to Work” legislation certainly fits this description.

No general strike can be rushed into. Workers must be educated and the ground carefully prepared. Holding a referendum vote in every local union gives the opportunity to discuss this unprecedented attack and how to respond with every worker at every work place.

Along with the UAW, the State AFL-CIO can urge every affiliate to initiate discussions and hold referendums to authorize a general strike. Mass strikes are part of our history — in 1947 250,000 autoworkers in Detroit held a five-hour walkout to protest the union-busting Taft-Hartley Act.

The Michigan politicians are not acting alone. The legislation was openly demanded by the Michigan Chamber of Commerce. We can be sure that the entire crowd of Wall Street bankers and corporate bosses, including GM, Ford, Chrysler and the billionaire Koch brothers are behind the push to break us in this stronghold and symbol of unionism.

After years of concessions the bosses thought we were ready to collapse. By moving methodically, vote by vote, toward a general strike, the working class of Michigan will send a message that will sow panic in their ranks. Let the big business news media, politicians, judges and others will scream that it is illegal. As the words of the union song Solidarity Forever says, “In our hands is placed a power greater than their hoarded gold, greater than

the might of armies magnified a thousand fold.” That power is our ability to bring everything to a standstill.

Unions are not a “special interest” apart from our suffering communities and all workers -- unorganized, retired, young, immigrant or unemployed. Along with uniting all the unions we must bring in the many community groups affected. Labor must make their problems our own. “Social unionism” can take a big leap forward. While proceeding to authorize the general strike, unions and community groups should convene a huge assembly of the people in Michigan.

Community organizations, church leaders, people of color, women, the LGBTQ community, the education community, foreclosure victims, the unemployed, Occupy Wall Street movement, immigrants and all others who are under attack must be brought together to prepare for the general strike. Demands must be shaped to make the largest majority of the people of the state understand that we are fighting for everyone.

In a state where local and state politicians only represent the 1%, an assembly of the 99%, will have commanding authority!

Issued by: **Committee to Beat Back "Right to Work"**
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