

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

June 13, 2011

What does it take to start a movement? A groundswell of people coming together for the greater good? The public employees in Wisconsin have certainly made a good start toward mobilizing many people to oppose Governor Walker's agenda. The focal point is his decision to strip public employees of their right to bargain.

Perhaps Governor Walker should get the credit for starting a new progressive movement in Wisconsin? After all, had he not insisted on destroying the power of the unions we would not now have 6 Republican senators facing recall elections this summer. The unions agreed to the cuts Walker demanded but he went ahead and took their rights away anyway. I think it was payback from when he was running Milwaukee County. He wanted to break those unions but couldn't. As I understand it, the legislation extends to all public employee unions in Wisconsin, not just state employees.

I agree with Governor Walker that the wages and benefits public employees receive are unsustainable. But he went about it all wrong. He could have negotiated with the unions and used the threat of legislation to get what he wanted. I think state pension programs should end and public employees should have 401k plans like most other workers have. That way, there will be no long-term legacy costs attached to benefits public employees receive. Neither should police and firefighters be exempted from the changes. There are hundreds of qualified applicants trying for those jobs. Cutting their wages and benefits to bring them in line with the law of supply and demand would save taxpayers money and not reduce the quality or quantity of services provided.

I applaud the motivated public employees who are expending time and money to deprive Governor Walker of his control over state government. It is heartening to see citizens become activists, to read about protesters being removed from legislative chambers for disrupting the proceedings.

The level of desperation the Republicans are experiencing is a wonderful sight: passing as much controversial legislation as they can before the recall elections, recruiting Republicans willing to run in Democratic primaries to delay recall elections and their sudden unwillingness to rubber stamp all of Governor Walker's agenda.

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I'd like to see Wisconsin become the progressive state it was when Fighting Bob LaFollette was around. Or back in the 1960s and 1970s when the labor unions held sway in the state capitol. Does anyone remember Governor Lucey who tried to close all the state prisons? Or Governor Doyle's father, Federal Judge James Doyle, who did more to establish and protect the rights of prisoners in Wisconsin than anyone else?

We need prison abolitionists more now than ever before. Men and women who are unafraid to stand up to a sensationalist news media and ideologically-driven conservatives to restore rational correctional policies to Wisconsin's criminal justice system. Mindless warehousing of our citizens for decades beyond the point where they no longer pose a threat to anyone is expensive, irrational and unwarranted.

I hope the success of the public employee's movement in Wisconsin will encourage others to step up and make a difference.

Vengeance

Vengeance leaves wreckage
Of head-on collision,
Bodies strewn about,
Crimson rivers of life ebbing.
Like dominoes, one tile
Falling into the next,
Cascading across lives,
Leaving carnage of post-hurricane
Devastation.
Forgiveness sticks in craw
Like a fish bone, choking,
Dislodged and digested
With daily bread
Of forgiveness.

Harlan Richards

Turbulence

Impassive, like the Buddha
Impervious to roiling seas
Of strife, washing up
On my shores.
Tranquility in the eye
Of a hurricane.
Anger spews from
Volcanoes of uncontrolled
Wrath; viscous, vicious lava
Incinerating lives, creating
Ashes of regret
Blown into atmosphere,
Grounding high-flying
Jets of happiness.

Harlan Richards

Fragile

I hold your heart in my hands
Humble, in awe of your trust,
Fragile as Fabrege egg,
Delicate as crystalline figurine.
Wishing with all my might
That I prove worthy,
Scared beyond reckoning,
I'll fail you, crushing
The gift entrusted to me.
Feeling inadequate, too short
To reach the top shelf,
Of my best self,
Where your safety lies.

Harlan Richards

Your Eyes

I want to look into your wondrous eyes,
See my love reflected there,
Shining bright with hope and joy,
Telling me I'm the one,
Who lights your life like the sun.
From my heart I speak to you,
Caress you with loving words,
Planting seeds within your heart,
To grow a love we can share.
I have no further want or need,
But to look into your wondrous eyes,
And see my love reflected there.

Harlan Richards