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ANALYSIS: ROBIN GEE

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## The making of Scott Walker

Wisconsin's dictatorial governor has distinguished himself during his career by imposing austerity while handing out favors to corporate backers, explains **Robin Gee**.

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ON THE advice of local law enforcement, the branch of M&I Bank in downtown Madison, Wis., shut its doors early March 11.

Earlier in the day, Local 311 firefighters and other workers showed up at the bank's door chanting "Move Your Money," and by the time the doors were closed, the firefighters had joined with teachers, police officers and others to withdraw nearly \$200,000 of their hard-earned money from the bank.

The action was part of a campaign to punish the bank and other big-money contributors to Gov. Scott Walker's election campaign. While Walker received plenty of "big money" contributions, most notably from billionaire brothers and Tea Party financiers David and Charles Koch, people reserved much vitriol for the bank as a very visible local symbol of Wall Street greed.

The bank received \$1.7 billion in bailout money from the Bush administration's Troubled Assets Relief Program and was subsequently acquired by the Bank of Montreal--but not before M&I CEO Mark Furlong got an \$18 million golden parachute.

M&I continues to deny contributing to any campaign because "that would be illegal," but almost 200 of the bank's executives gave between \$100 and \$5,000 each to Walker to fund his gubernatorial run, according to the campaign finance watchdog site [Wisconsin Democracy Campaign](#) [1], a statewide campaign finance watchdog site. This is, of course, on top of PAC contributions and other more "backdoor" ways of financing campaigns.

Still, the Koch brothers remain two of the largest and most high-profile of Walker's contributors. They gave \$43,000 directly through their KochPAC, and another \$65,000 was funneled through the Republican Governors Association (RGA), which received \$1 million from the Koch boys to help fund a number of campaigns. In addition, the RGA spent \$3.4 million on television ads and mailings attacking Walker's opponent in the race.

In truth, \$1 million is a drop in the bucket for the billionaire Kochs, who spent more than twice that on über-conservative candidates in the last election cycle. The brothers fund several right-wing organizations such as the Cato Institute, but are best known for their backing of Americans for Prosperity, a nonprofit behind the Tea Party movement,

whose coffers have grown from \$7 million in 2007 to \$40 million in 2010, much of it Koch money.

While Walker prides himself on being a small-town preacher's son with strong conservative "social values," his willingness to open the doors wide for corporate interests--and to openly and viciously attack working people--in the name of austerity that caught the Koch brothers attention.

Walker's assault on public-sector unions with his "budget repair bill"--and its obvious implications for organized labor throughout the economy--will definitely help his biggest backers. Koch Industries owns paper industry giant Georgia-Pacific Corporation as well as the Koch Pipeline Co.

But even more importantly, the more politicians the Koch brothers can put on their payroll, the easier it is for them to trample, circumvent or rewrite environmental and safety standards and other regulations that might "impede" their profit-making.

Walker is hardly alone in his assault on workers' rights, his servile attitude to corporate power and his zeal for the ideological pet projects of the Republican Party's right wing. In several Midwestern states and beyond, Republicans with Tea Party backing are looking to wipe out what remains of social programs, environmental regulation and labor unions.

But Walker seems to take special pride in doing whatever he can to help. Buried in his original budget repair bill was a measure to privatize Wisconsin's state-run power plants--and sell them in a no-bid scenario to Koch Industries.

Although removed from the bill when it was rammed through the legislature in mid-March, plans are in place to include the measure in the main budget bill, or pass it as a separate piece of legislation. In anticipation of the sale, the Republicans recently approved \$9 million to spiff up the facilities. So much for fiscal restraint.

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WALKER'S TIES to corporate contributors--and his willingness to bend the rules for them--were well known even before he became governor. After a stint in the state legislature, Walker became Milwaukee County executive in 2002. He was considered a "fresh face," someone who promised to exercise fiscal responsibility in tough times.

But Milwaukee County residents quickly learned that "responsibility" and "belt-tightening" were only expected of the shrinking middle class, workers and the poor. For Walker's fat-cat contributors in the construction, real estate and manufacturing industries, it was business as usual.

Walker was never very good at math, and so he saw no contradiction in promising balanced budgets without raising property taxes, while maintaining county services and pledging to protect "the little guy." While it's true that he didn't raise property taxes, he vastly overestimated revenues and underestimated (at least publicly) the cuts in services needed to keep his promises.

In his first two years in office, the county ran out of funds midyear, forcing layoffs and

drastic cuts to services.

Public park and recreation facilities were a favorite target. Walker gutted the park maintenance budget, forcing pools to shut midsummer and imposing drastic staff cuts at all park facilities. Locals say it was only sheer luck that winters were light during those two years because the money to run the county's snowplows wasn't there.

Walker also hatched a number of schemes to sell publicly owned county lands--a proposal he has also introduced in his current state budget in the form of a sell-off of portions of the state's northern woods to mineral and timber interests.

He went on to slash budgets for mental health services, programs to treat alcoholism and other drug abuse, prison reform and education programs, and battered women's shelters. He cut money to public transportation, forcing an increase in bus fares. He cut funding to local arts and education programs.

And then he cut deeply into the General Assistance Medical Program (GAMP) designed to provide essential health care services to the county's poorest citizens. He instituted a \$35 fee to use GAMP, although most of those eligible for the program didn't have the resources to feed themselves, let alone pay for health care. As a result, area emergency rooms filled to capacity.

With headlines such as "Walker whacks workers," local newspapers had fun with Walker's hiring of the private security company Wackenhut, a UK-based firm that muckraking journalist Greg Palast has exposed as a low-wage, low-quality favorite of union-busters and privatizers.

Claiming a fiscal emergency, Walker used taxpayer dollars to hire the company to replace union security guards at the county courthouse and two other buildings. An arbitrator later ruled that there was no crisis and that the union contract had to be honored and the guards rehired, adding more cost to an already costly mess.

Walker has demonstrated over and over again that he can be counted on to hold stubbornly to his plans to destroy unions, drive down wages and balance the budget on the backs of Wisconsin's workers. He's proven to his backers that he can hold steadfast in the face of overwhelming opposition, yet it is his pliability and willingness to do the bidding of his corporate backers that keep the contributions rolling in.

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