

Unions brought this on themselves  
Their bullying has set the stage for the current backlash  
[David Blaska](#) on Thursday 02/24/2011, [\(3\) Comments](#)



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What a historic two weeks! Newspaper headlines and TV footage ricochet between the clever picket signs and chants of the Great Siege of the Wisconsin State Capitol and scenes of smoke and sirens in the latest Middle East hotspot.

"Bloody Crackdown" announced my morning paper Monday — Libya, thank God, not Madison.

Passions run high in both places. So perhaps it is understandable that my colleague and friend Bill Lueders, in an [online article](#), levels the charge that the *Wisconsin State Journal's* commentary on this issue "belittles state workers."

The *Isthmus* news editor rips Madison's newspaper of record for "going the extra mile to heap derision on the hundreds of thousands of teachers, nurses, social workers, prison guards, streets workers, police officers and firefighters who have taken to the streets this week in protest of Gov. Scott Walker's assault against public employee unions in Wisconsin."

Here's one theory, Bill: No one on the *State Journal* — and few elsewhere in the private sector — get anywhere near the pay, pension, health insurance, vacation, sick leave or job security that government employees enjoy. Newspapers, here and everywhere, have already implemented the layoffs that Gov. Walker is trying to avoid.

My friends on the left say they're amazed at how Scott Walker and his friends at Fox News have been able to demonize public employee unions. For my money, it's the teachers unions, in particular, that have done the heavy lifting.

**While Britain's socialist Labourites, before Tony Blair**, aspired to control the commanding heights of industry — coal, steel and the like — the teachers union has something much better: our kids.

Let's face it: Teachers union president John Matthews decides when to open and when to close Madison schools; the superintendent can't even get a court order to stop him. East High teachers marched half the student body up East Washington Avenue Tuesday last week. Indoctrination, anyone?

This Tuesday, those students began their first day back in class with the rhyming cadences of professional protester Jesse Jackson, fresh from exhorting unionists at the Capitol, blaring over the school's loudspeakers. Indoctrination, anyone?

Madison Teachers Inc. has been behind every local referendum to blow apart spending restraints. Resist, as did elected school board member Ruth Robarts, and Matthews will brand you "Public Enemy Number One."

When then-school board member Juan Jose Lopez would not feed out of the union's hand, Matthews sent picketers to his place of business, which happened to be Briarpatch, a haven for troubled kids. Cross that line, kid!

The teachers union is the playground bully of state government. Wisconsin Education Association Council spent \$1.5 million lobbying the Legislature in 2009, more than any other entity and three times the amount spent by WMC, the business lobby. Since 1998.

Under Gov. Doyle, teachers were allowed to blow apart measures to restrain spending and legislate the union message into the curriculum. Student test scores could be used to determine teacher pay — but only if the unions agreed.

The most liberal president since FDR came to a school in Madison to announce "Race to the Top" grants for education reform. How many millions of dollars did we lose when the statewide teachers union sandbagged the state's application?

In a school district that graduates only 45% of its high school students, what is the Milwaukee teachers union willing to go to the mattresses over? Court-ordered Viagra!

Even many liberals are beginning to recoil. Madison Urban League president Kaleem Caire wants no unions in his proposed Madison Prep charter school. At UW-Madison, Chancellor Biddy Martin is resisting Jim Doyle's unionization of college campuses as a threat to shared governance principle.

**The inherently adversarial nature of labor unions** is so 1930s. President Franklin Roosevelt warned in 1937, "The process of collective bargaining, as usually understood, cannot be transplanted into the public service."

Today, only 7% of private-sector workers are unionized. The surprise is that Wisconsin is one of only 26 states to allow collective bargaining for essentially all state and local workers, according to the Cato Institute.

The *Wisconsin State Journal* is wrong, however, to say "the chaos we're experiencing in Wisconsin is simply the extreme manifestation of politics as usual."

Since the rise of the Tea Parties two years ago, our politics has been most unusual. Revolutionary, actually. Madison, Wisconsin, is ground zero for how government will operate in the 21st century, the template for similar struggles in states from New York to Tennessee, the dress rehearsal for the budget showdown next month in Washington, D.C.

Madison is engaged in a "who shall rule" struggle. At issue: whether the well-organized public-sector unionists can — in a reversal of Cairo's Tahrir Square demonstrations — shout down the will of the people, as expressed on Nov. 2 in free and open elections.