

## Rightwing Outfits Spread the Slime for Walker

By Rebecca Kemble, May 23, 2012

On Sunday morning, some subscribers of the Janesville Gazette received a supplement with their paper. It was a two-page broadsheet designed to look like an insert containing the names and salaries of Janesville School District teachers, along with instructions on how to access the [Verify the Recall database](#) to find out whether they signed a recall petition against Scott Walker. At the bottom of the page is a form to fill out and send to the Superintendent requesting that one's child be assigned to a "non-radical" teacher for the 2012 – 2013 school year.

Janesville, Wisconsin, is the subject of the documentary film, "[As Goes Janesville](#)," by Brad Lichtenstein that features the now famous "[divide and conquer](#)" statement made by Scott Walker to billionaire owner of ABC Supply, Diane Hendricks. Walker was referring to his plan to demonize public sector workers and strip them of collective bargaining rights as a way to divide and conquer the working class. So it seems fitting that this new form of McCarthyite witch hunting would surface in Janesville.

Although designed to appear as if it was part of the paper, the Gazette denied printing or distributing the flier. Upon investigation, [the Gazette reported that the flier was made and distributed by a Milwaukee-based rightwing PAC](#), Citizens for Responsible Government or [CRG Network](#). CRG representative Orville Seymer claimed it was the work of local Janesville activists who preferred to remain anonymous.

But scratch the surface of this kind of "activism" and you'll find a well-oiled and well-funded propaganda machine, fueled by some of the largest corporations in the world. Faced with the limits of natural resources and the instability of global financial markets, profit-hungry businesses have turned their attention to the public sector and intensified the exploitation of labor in a desperate attempt to maintain their profit margins quarter after relentless quarter.

Giant corporations like Microsoft and Koch Industries fund free-market think tanks like the Cato Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Manhattan Institute and the Heartland Institute. They in turn develop networks of academic experts, journalists and legislative staffers who produce and promote editorial opinions and actual public policy designed to privatize and deregulate just about everything, and they do it in the name of "small government" and "liberty."

Liberty is the archetypal jackpot that keeps paying off for the propaganda arm of the corporate elite. It is the ideological sleight of hand that induces millions of Americans who are oppressed by the economic conditions created by these very same corporations to embrace free-market ideology in the guise of individual freedom.

Liberty has been carefully crafted by free-market think tanks as the symbolic center of what has become Tea Party ideology. It is the mobilizing force for local Tea Party groups organized by political operatives at the national level. Founded and funded by Charles and David Koch, [Americans For Prosperity](#) is probably the most well-known of these "astroturfing" groups, so called because they don't have real roots in communities but are organized by corporate interests from above.

AFP has been active in Wisconsin this past year, partnering with the local free-market think tank MacIver Institute to create Scott Walker's ["It's Working" campaign](#). They are also conducting a 10 city, four day bus tour throughout the state during the week before Walker's recall election: "AFP-Wisconsin will be coming to a community near you! Join us as we continue to fight for limited government, lower taxes and economic freedom," proclaims their promotional material.

In advance of the Walker's recall election, other rightwing "activist training" sessions have been offered throughout the state organized by a variety of other groups. The Heritage Foundation's [Values Bus tour](#) swept through the state this past weekend and is due back sometime next month, and the [National Rifle Association](#) sponsored two training sessions last week. Here's how they promoted their events:

"To ensure pro-Second Amendment Governor Scott Walker wins his recall election on June 5, we need your help! Learn how you can get actively involved in our efforts to ensure Gov. Walker is re-elected at one of our free NRA-ILA Grassroots Workshops."

Originally scheduled to take place at Gander Mountain hunting and fishing retail stores, the workshops had to be re-located [after Wisconsinites threatened to boycott the store](#) for promoting Scott Walker. Walker is a darling of the NRA, since under his administration [most of their proposed legislation was passed into law](#). Concealed carry with no meaningful training requirements, Castle Doctrine, and the most permissive wolf-hunting law in the country were highlights of their winning season under Walker.

A Tea Party umbrella group called [Wisconsin Conservatives](#) that includes the CRG Network also hosted and promoted a series of "activist" training sessions, including one that promised to teach participants "how to increase the vote through absentee ballots." They list as partners local think tanks MacIver and the [Pax Americana Institute](#), whose mission is to promote, "policy solutions that advance a global empire of liberty."

An organization called [American Majority](#) also held several training sessions around the state earlier this year. One of the more brazen rightwing astroturfing groups around, they identify themselves as a, "political training institute whose mission is to train and equip a national network of leadership committed to individual freedom through limited government and the free market." Many of their staffers are graduates of Jerry Falwell's [Liberty University](#), the self-proclaimed "largest Christian university in the world." Much of their funding comes from the Chicago-based [Sam Adams Alliance](#).

The [Heartland Institute](#) is another Chicago-based free market think tank that has direct links to Wisconsin. Milwaukee's Bradley Foundation has funded them to the tune of nearly \$1 million over the past decade. Earlier this year, Think Progress published [a series of confidential documents](#) leaked by a Heartland staffer. One of these was their [2012 fundraising plan](#), which included a political project in Wisconsin called Operation Angry Badger.

In their description of Operation Angry Badger, Heartland lists their propaganda efforts throughout 2011 to support Act 10, the law that essentially repeals collective bargaining for state workers. They also discuss the importance of the Wisconsin recall elections as, "referenda on collective bargaining reform at the state level, making them of national interest. Successful recalls would be a major setback to the national effort to rein in public sector compensation and union power."

They continue: "Heartland is the largest and most influential national free-market think tank in the Midwest, so we are in the right place and with the right resources to help defend and secure Wisconsin's recent gains."

How exactly do they intend to defend and secure these gains? Operation Angry Badger offers a five-point plan:

1. Recruit and promote superintendents who support Act 10
2. Explain the benefits of Act 10
3. Document the shortcomings of public schools in Wisconsin
4. Expose teacher pay in key districts
5. Create blogs that shadow small town newspaper coverage of the controversy

Point 4 brings us back to those Janesville “activists” who wish to remain anonymous. It costs a lot of money to gather and organize data on teachers’ salaries, design, print and distribute thousands of fliers. At the time of the publication of Heartland’s fundraising plan last January, they had already secured \$100,000 from an anonymous source for the project, and hoped to raise a half a million more.

For the next two weeks until election day on June 5, the propaganda machines will be working overtime to prop up Scott Walker, Lt. Governor Rebecca Kleefisch and the four Republican senators facing recall challenges. Whether or not the power of Wisconsinites organizing themselves against this onslaught of money and rightwing political influence in the media can prevail is still very much an open question.

[Rebecca Kemble](#) is an Anthropologist who studied decolonization in Kenya. She serves on the Board of the US Federation of Worker Cooperatives and is a founding member of the Wisconsin Citizens Media Cooperative.