

Urge Unity, Blast Wall Street  
Labor's 'Sleeping Giant' Roars in Times Square

**THOUSANDS IN SOLIDARITY**



The Chief-Leader/Michel Friang

THOUSANDS IN SOLIDARITY: Union members turned out in force along four blocks of 7th Ave. near Times Square in Manhattan April 10 for the 'We Are One' rally, part of a nationwide week of events protesting attacks against unions and public-employee workers. The rally was prompted by laws being passed or under consideration in states like Wisconsin, Florida, Ohio and Indiana that would limit the collective-bargaining rights of state employees.

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By DAVID SIMS |

Roughly 15,000 union members from all walks of life filled four city blocks in Times Square April 9 to demonstrate solidarity with workers around the country and as a show of force against elected officials advocating cuts in pensions, benefits and rollbacks of collective-bargaining rights.

The New York State AFL-CIO organized the rally, which was done concurrently with demonstrations all around the country under the "We Are One" banner, emphasizing the unifying thread for all workers.

**'Stand Up for Each Other'**

"That common goal is to fight for each other and stand up for each other," State AFL-CIO President Denis Hughes said in an interview. "I've never seen this much struggle in the 41 years that I've been a member. So it just gave us an opportunity for everyone to unite and feel good about it."

The rally stretched several blocks down 7th Ave. from 42nd St. “We had one of the largest crowds I’d ever seen assembled on a Saturday with two weeks’ notice. So it shows that people want to do this, you’ve got to give them the opportunity, but they want to do it,” Mr. Hughes said.

Speakers mixed a sentiment of togetherness with aggressive challenges to Governors around the country who have pushed legislation that infringes on collective-bargaining rights for state employees.

“That cheesehead asshole they made Governor of Wisconsin awoke a sleeping giant,” Communications Workers of America District 1 Vice President Chris Shelton told a cheering crowd, referring to Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker. “And we’re here to tell him that the sleeping giant is pissed off!”

### **Resist Efforts to Divide**

District Council 37 Executive Director Lillian Roberts said workers had to resist efforts by politicians to divide them, whether public-sector against private-sector, or uniformed against non-uniformed. “We are not each other’s problem—this is bigger than they expected, so we are going to have to stay together to let them know that workers united can never be defeated,” she said. “In my 50 years of labor I have never seen us come together as we have today.”

Public Employees Federation President Kenneth Brynien said that New Yorkers should not grow complacent just because they didn’t elect a Republican Governor in 2010. “Some of our politicians say you don’t have to worry, because New York is not Wisconsin,” he said. “I don’t think they get it...do you value the right to belong to a union? Then you are Wisconsin, you are Indiana, Ohio, New Hampshire.”

Many speakers focused their ire on the financial industry, saying that budgets should be balanced by taxing the barons of Wall Street, rather than on the backs of workers. “Twenty years from now, the Teachers of this country will be teaching the story of how 1 percent of the country tried to steal it,” United Federation of Teachers President Michael Mulgrew said. “The workers rose up, they united, they said, ‘We’re not gonna have that in our country and we’re gonna take it back.’ You all are part of that story.”

### **‘Teachers Didn’t Create Crisis’**

His UFT predecessor, American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, said, “There were a lot of people who created the fiscal crisis but it wasn’t the Teachers standing in front of the blackboard...we’re standing together for the American dream, for a dream that says our better days are ahead of us, not behind us.”

Professional Staff Congress President Barbara Bowen, who was recently arrested protesting the passage of a state budget in Albany, said, “We are in the grip of a crisis in this state and this city. This is not an economic crisis, it is a political crisis... If this is a war on working people, something big is at stake. We are the last defense of the middle class, the working class, the people of colors and the poor.”

Mr. Hughes, speaking after the rally dispersed, said that he felt that organized labor’s message was spreading further than usual thanks to an aggressive campaign. “It isn’t just union guys, it’s non-union guys as well, who experienced the loss of their benefits and the loss of economic security and didn’t have a way to push back. They’re encouraged by this kind of pushback.”

He added, “People want to make sure their rights are preserved. I feel better about this movement now than I have in many years. From this crisis is really coming a focus.”