

THE SECOND BATTLE OF TRENTON

Mass Strike Resurges In New Jersey

by Nancy Spannaus

June 25—In line with Lyndon LaRouche’s latest political and economic forecast, the state of New Jersey—and implicitly, the United States as a whole—has entered into a new phase of mass-strike protest, accelerated by the state budget crisis. The protests, which built up in the Trenton area over the week of June 16-23, centered around a bill which has just passed the state legislature, which makes radical changes to the percentages paid by public employees to their health-care plans, and to the collective bargaining rights of unions.

The bill was pushed through the state legislature by aid of a deal between Democratic Ironworker’s Union member, Senate President Steve Sweeney, and Republican Governor Chris Christie. Democratic Speaker of the House Sheila Oliver also agreed to capitulate to Christie’s assault on the collective bargaining rights of union members. It was this treasonous sellout by the top leadership of the Democratic Party, which prompted labor activists to organize a New Orleans-style funeral service for the “Soul of the Democratic Party” on June 23.

The funeral included a New Orleans-style band with tuba, trombone, trumpet, banjo, and a hearse which had a large sign on the side: “Soul of the Democratic Party.” The march of about 1,000 unionists in the funeral procession carried a large banner which read, “Death of the Democratic Party (as we know it).” At 11:00 a.m., the “funeral procession” joined a 2,500-person rally out-

side the statehouse in anticipation of a early afternoon vote in the legislature.

By 6:15 p.m., a protest of about 8,500 people was reported.

It was the dramatic growth of the protest in a matter of a few hours, as well as the composition and target of the rally, that signalled to LaRouche that this event reflected a qualitative shift in the U.S. mass-strike process which has been oscillating between simmering and boiling over, since the Summer of 2009.

The Stick and the Blob

Throughout this year’s fight over the New Jersey budget, LaRouche Congressional candidate Diane Sare has been waging a high-profile attack against the governor and his austerity economics, accusing him of being nothing but an obese version of President Barack Obama. It’s a case of the “stick and the blob,” both demanding that the majority of the population sacrifice their health care and living standards to support the interests of Wall Street.

Clearly, Christie’s style is more confrontational than Obama’s. The governor, who took office in January 2010, revels in attacking public employees as persons of privilege, at the same time that he has vetoed a surtax on the incomes of millionaires. He declared a state of fiscal emergency within weeks of taking office, and has used his executive powers to slash taxes, payments to



New Jersey's Republican Gov. Christie, joined by sellout Democrats in the State Assembly, pushed through a bone-cutting austerity budget targeting public sector workers, despite mass protests at the capital in Trenton, seen here on June 23. But the battle has just begun.

the pension fund, aid to schools, and to the indigent. He even cancelled the major federally co-sponsored project which would have built a new tunnel under the Hudson River, connecting New Jersey with New York City.

While bragging of his budget-cutting approach, however, Christie has repeatedly responded to Sare's questions about Glass-Steagall by declaring his opposition, saying he would never accept "Federal money to bail out profligate spending by the state."

Obama, for his part, strikes a softer tone, but the result is virtually the same. Public employees under Obama have been subjected to a wage freeze, and the Social Security Trust Fund has been effectively robbed by the December 2010 deal with the Republicans on cutting back the employee portion of the payroll tax. The nation's teachers unions have been the major target of the President's Race to the Top program, a union-busting venture, and the health care of the elderly and poor (Medicare and Medicaid) have been targeted by the Obama Administration as *the* major cause of the Federal deficit, and thus, the key area to be cut.

Most importantly, Obama has clung to the policy of serving Wall Street through ongoing massive bailouts administered through Fannie Mae, the Federal Reserve, and the Treasury, which put government support behind trillions in casino debts, while leaving the government without funds for the states, and vitally needed public

works. And it was Obama who personally assured the defeat of Glass-Steagall in June of 2010.

Bipartisan Fascism

For those who didn't believe Sare when she identified Obama and Christie as thin and fat versions of the same breed, the budget negotiations of 2011 have been an eye-opener.

On the face of it, Christie didn't have a chance to get the legislature to pass his union-busting demands. The Democrats control both the House and the Senate by significant majorities: 47-to-33

in the House, and 23-to-17 in the Senate. He would be forced to negotiate. In addition, the Democratic base was mobilized in the streets.

Although the numbers have not risen to the level of May 2010, when the state capital of Trenton saw the largest demonstration in the state's history—between 30,000 and 35,000—the state employees unions have been holding frequent demonstrations in the state capital ever since Christie announced his plans for the 2012 budget. At the point where it became clear that the Democratic leadership in the legislature had made a deal with the fascist governor, however, the actions grew more serious.

On June 16, after hearing that Obama Democrats in the State Assembly, led by Sweeney, had supported the bill that shifts greater costs for health and pension benefits onto 500,000 public sector workers, some 3,500-5,000 union members, teachers, firefighters, police, and other public workers rallied in Trenton.

Demonstrators not only condemned Christie, but also those Democrats who aligned themselves with him. The new package that the Senate's budget committee agreed to on June 15 would increase state and local government workers' contributions from \$900 to \$2,056 per year, or \$3,230 per year for a family plan. It would also increase workers' pension contributions, and raise the retirement age for new hires from 62 to 65. The package also restricts collective bargaining rights on health benefit contributions.



EIRNS/Diane Sare

A New Orleans-style funeral march commemorating the demise of the “Soul of the Democratic Party” was featured at the June 23 rally, which drew some 8,500 people in protest against the draconian austerity budget.

The demonstrators were livid. Bob Master, political director of the Communications Workers of America (CWA), told the crowd that “Real Democrats would kill this bill, because workers’ rights are human rights.” AFSCME number-two national officer Lee Saunders accused the state’s leading politicians of being nothing more than fronts for corporate CEOs. “We are under attack from coast to coast,” he said. “All working people are at risk when voices are silenced.”

Christopher Shelton, international vice president of CWA’s District 1, went so far as to compare Christie to Adolf Hitler. “In Nazi Germany,” he said, “the first thing they did was go after the unions, and that’s what Christie and his two generals are trying to do in New Jersey!” Shelton was immediately denounced by the usual suspects and forced to issue an apology, but as LaRouchePAC organizers reported from the scene, more people than not understood the reality of the bipartisan fascist attack, and that Barack Obama is the biggest part of the problem.

The Second Battle of Trenton

A few days later, on June 20, the unionists were back in Trenton, as hearings on the sellout bill were still occurring. Over 1,000 people came out to the Trenton Statehouse under the banner of the “Second Battle of

Trenton.” They started with a march across the Delaware River, with reenactors in colonial dress leading the labor unionists. Also, some protestors set up “Camp Collective Bargaining,” about 50 tents pitched behind the Statehouse.

From the standpoint of stopping the sellout, however, it was too little, too late. On June 23, three days later, 14 Democrats joined 32 Republicans in voting for Christie’s “reform,” giving the overfed governor a 46-to-32 majority.

Christie immediately began to crow, bragging that his bill savaging public sector workers is going to be “a national model, and will be hailed across the country as an example of bipartisanship that the President and the Congress can only aspire to.”

Echoing Obama, Christie lied that government pension and health-care obligations are “the core problems of government spending in the country.” Should Democratic President Obama follow Christie’s lead, and personally take charge the budget negotiations with Congressional Republicans, the New Jersey governor feels sure that the Federal government could impose even greater fascist austerity upon the American people. Magnanimously, the Republican governor granted that, “I would not have been able to achieve this for New Jersey without the Senate President Steve Sweeney and the Speaker of the Assembly Sheila Oliver,” both Democrats. “Everybody came together, put aside party,” said Christie.

It was in the face of this overt bipartisan fascist alliance, that the June 23 New Orleans Funeral March was staged.

But what will be the next step? The only solution to the real economic, as well as political, problems of the state is reinstating Glass-Steagall, as some political institutions in New Jersey have recognized. The New Jersey AFL-CIO, which has over 1 million members according to its website, recently passed a resolution in support of H.R. 1489, a return to the Glass-Steagall Act. Similarly with several towns in the state, including the fourth-largest city, Elizabeth.

To win the Second Battle of Trenton, Glass-Steagall must be the next step.