

VC ECHOES

Volume 13, Issue 4

Valley Central Teachers' Association

March 2011

SOLIDARITY RALLY TO SUPPORT WISCONSIN WORKERS 3/3/11



SOLIDARITY



WISCONSIN'S ANTI-UNION BILL PASSED ON MARCH 9, 2011. ITS CONSTITUTIONALITY WILL BE CHALLENGED IN THE COURTS. 22 STATES ARE CURRENTLY DISCUSSING SIMILAR LEGISLATION.

There are no greater advocates for children and education than teachers and teacher unions.

Valley Central Teachers' Association

1175 State Route 17K
Montgomery, NY 12549
Tel/Fax: (845) 457-5899

In this issue:

Equally Sharing	2
Edge of History	3
Robin Hood	4
Education De- pression	6
Making Sense	8
Solidarity Speech	9

VCTA Officers:

President, Tim Brown (HS)
Vice Pres, Richard Steger (W)
Vice Pres., Patti Lunden (HS)
Secretary, Scott Warner (HS)
Treasurer, Jennie Sexton (HS)

**Contribute to the February issue!
Articles or
Contributions
should be sent to
Meghan Rilley, HS, by
1 April 2011**

Executive Council Building Representatives

- Berea: Lisa Daily, Robin Scott, Maura Crown
- E. Coldenham: Sandy Carroll, Cathi Heil
- Maybrook: Linda Draughn, Donna Lloyd
- Montgomery: Brian Ackley, Gail Nozell, Andrea Smyth
- Walden: Mary Ellen Kawauchi, Susan Driscoll, Randy Sutter
- Middle School: Chris Arndt, Sonya Berger, Mary Bleau, Tammy Coleman, Joe Collins, Frank Di Pasqua, Anne McKallen
- High School: Nancy Brother, Roberta Betanzos, Deborah McKenney, Christine Mello, Antoinette Oakes, Beverly Risco, Melissa Verlin, Keith Sexton (A)
- Secretarial Rep: JoAnn Cassisi (HS)
- Para Rep: Kathy Lennon (W)

The VC Echoes is the official publication of the Valley Central Teachers' Association—Local 3076—and is published regularly during the school year. Any articles submitted to the VC Echoes will also be posted on the VCTA web site.

Equally Sharing the Burden

Stop Piggybacking on New Teachers' Backs!

*VC Echoes is
a NYSUT
and AFT
Award-
winning
Publication!*

Among Governor Cuomo's many anti-public education proposals is a new tier in the NYSTRS. This new tier would raise retirement age and increase the number of years an employee must work before being vested in the system. In 2009, NYS created a Tier 5 which adopted the above policy changes for new members. Creating new tiers is aimed strictly at those new to the teaching profession. How will these new provisions impact the field's ability to attract the best and the brightest? Beyond the fact that fewer people will become teachers, is it fair to constantly burden new teachers? With the economic crisis that NY seems to face, new teachers are already stressed-out about job prospects or keeping the jobs they may have.

Despite the fact that the TRS is well managed and both employer and employee contributions declined dramatically over the past 20 years due to fiscal responsibility, the perception of extravagant cost is still posing a problem to public workers. One perceptual alternative might be (cont'd pg 7)

Standing on the Edge of History

What has been happening in our nation and in our state in the past few weeks has been nothing less than astounding. In a matter of weeks, years of labor progress are being repealed and history is being disregarded from sea to shining sea of our nation. Is it worrisome that the most rational news coverage is by Jon Stewart and Comedy Central while CNN worries about Charlie Sheen's latest rant? Rome burned while the emperor "fiddled." Where is President Obama? Didn't he promise to stand up against any threat to labor unions by getting a comfortable pair of shoes? He needs to take a walk to Wisconsin.

According to John Gardner, history never looks like history when you are living through it. The rallies taking place in our backyard and across our country will be viewed as the middle class standing up to have its voice heard. What is happening to unions and education is unprecedented. Unions are responsible for living wages, 40 hour work weeks, vacation, lunch breaks, health and retirement benefits, and worker safety.

The anti union, anti public school, anti-teacher sentiment flooding every media outlet is raising many questions, not least of which is: *Since when has the middle class become the affluent?*

In 2009 when bank executives were being given million dollar bonuses from the TARP, the bonuses were justified by the fact that they were contractual. Why then are state governments insisting on breaking contractual obligations to public employees?

In 2009, a tax surcharge was proposed on couples making more than \$250,000 a year. Opponents insisted that this amount was not affluent for a family of 4. Why then is a teacher's salary in Wisconsin of \$51,000 considered excessive?

Other important questions to consider:

- Why are the millionaire hedge funds trying to undo the public school system?
- Why are millionaires and billion dollar corporations given tax breaks while the middle class struggles to get by?
- Why is tenure regarded as a job for life, when it is really just due process?
- Why are veteran teachers labeled as bad and lazy?
- Why does Wall Street which plummeted the country into recession and pocketed profits, want to get its hands on public employee pension funds?

Educators have the unique skill set of being able to educate, organize and motivate others. Is that why we are being attacked? Collective bargaining rights are not something we were given. They are the result of the hard work of those who came before we did, as is everything in our collective bargaining agreement. We have a responsibility to those who came before and those who will come after us to protect those rights from unfair attack. We have a responsibility to the children in our classroom to speak up and speak out for their future. Is there anything the children of 2011 should not have that students before them did have?

We are standing on the edge of history. We have a choice to make, we can make history or be history. Stand up and speak out every opportunity you have. Tomorrow depends on it.

—Patti Lunden, HS Art, VCTA VP

Robin Hood is Missing: Sherwood is burning

It would appear that Sherwood Forest has been burning for the past 30 years while Robin Hood was imprisoned or killed without the poor, oppressed or working class even noticing this dramatic turn of events. I find it somewhat ironic that Americans adore Robin Hood stories but seem to be unable to do anything other than blindly follow Prince John and the Sheriff of Nottingham. One might suggest that the working class gets what it deserves for being so gullible, but that might be a bit like blaming poor crime victims for not having personal security teams to protect their families.

In my college days—when I was younger and even more annoying than I am now—I made the following comment—to the surprise of my professor: “Democracy is that form of government that permits the ignorant to vote for what they do not understand; however, I favor this over the tyranny of a dictatorship.”

“...public education is being blamed for escalating property taxes despite the fact that both the federal and state governments have failed to provide promised funding, which ultimately

The problem is that the distinction between tyranny and freedom/justice is becoming more difficult to make. To win the hearts of the American people, a message must be framed and delivered. This message must touch the hearts of the citizenry and provide hope for the future. Winning messages must be short in duration and substance to reach a maximum audience, which, of course, in turn generally makes the message useless at best and manipulatively harmful at worst.

NYSUT is attempting to frame a message but it is difficult to compete with corporations that have unlimited resources at their disposal to lobby both politicians and media moguls. (NOTE: Don't forget to give to VOTE-COPE—it's our last best hope to reveal the truth.) This should not

come as a major surprise since corporations are “people too” according to the US Supreme Court. Well...if corporations are people...why aren't they paying their taxes like everyone else. Wall Street is currently doing great thanks to the fact that corporations “extorted” the working class of its hard-earned money so as to not go bankrupt due to its own greed and corruption. Both Presidents Bush and Obama provided stimulus packages without any real strings attached and the American people sat helplessly watching as Prince John continued to step on the hopes and dreams of work-

ing class families and their children. Wall Street and its corporate beneficiaries are doing well after accepting billions of working class tax dollars, yet they continue to successfully lobby elected officials to be exempt from paying taxes themselves. What's most interesting is that corporations and millionaires have been successful in taking attention off of the impact of their greed by getting the working class to attack one another over

job losses and inflation. Police, firefighters, transportation workers, etc. are being blamed for the economy. Teachers, generally considered the lowest paid professional occupation, are being blamed for not being able to fix all of America's cultural and social apathy issues, despite the fact that they are given virtually no real or practical authority to do so. In addition to this, public education is being blamed for escalating property taxes despite the fact that both the federal and state governments have failed to provide promised funding, which ultimately passes this expense on to local taxpayers. As this is being written, Prince John is persisting with his plan to relieve the rich of their “unfair tax burden.”

There has been much talk (cont'd pg 5)

Robin Hood is Missing (from page 4)



about the “need” to eliminate the “millionaire’s tax.” Poor millionaires—if they don’t get their way they will leave New York. A study of New Jersey’s millionaire’s tax demonstrates that this is untrue—a scare tactic used to get the working class in line (<http://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2011/02/quelle-surprise-tax-increases-on-rich-do-not-lead-to-exodus.html>). Millionaires

seem to have a warped view of what constitutes unfair taxation. For instance, social security tax is currently 6.2% and this 6.2% is applied only to the first \$106,800 an individual makes. This means that a working class family making \$106,800 will pay \$6,621.60 and an individual making \$10 million per year will also pay \$6,621.60 for the year. I wasn’t sure if I should include the bonus money paid to struggling Wall Street executives. This bonus money is also exempt from this tax levy that so heavily impacts America’s poor and middle class. If the wealthy paid their fair share of social security tax there would be less of a burden on the poor and middle class and less of a burden on employers that are also responsible for another 6.2% of this levy. NOTE: At the Committee of 100 lobbying day in Albany on Tuesday, February 15, an extremely rude and obnoxious senator’s attorney/aide stated that anyone who called this a “millionaire’s tax” was disingenuous since this really impacted anyone making over \$200,000. He is, of course correct about the \$200,000; however, it is the press and politicians who persist in using this terminology. I also strongly suspect that this individual is more interested in protecting his own personal income than being objective. I would like to go on record that if the District were to double my salary to meet the \$200,000 benchmark, I would not object to paying a slightly higher rate of taxes.

New York State is currently facing a \$10 billion deficit—or is it? Approximately \$6 billion of this deficit is a projection based on the anticipated end of the millionaire’s tax. This simply looks like another stimulus package to me—a forced gift from the poor and middle class to the rich. Our political gullibility must end or our families will suffer while the gap between the rich and everyone else becomes so broad that we envy Argentina’s and India’s enlightened treatment of their poor. A nation cannot survive on the backs of the working class. Where is Robin Hood? How did Prince John so easily convince us that stealing from the working class to give to the rich was honorable and just?

Speak Out! Please visit our “Legislative Action” portion of vcta.net to send letters to your elected officials.

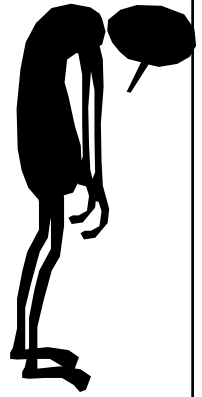
—Tim Brown, HS, Health and President, VCTA

It can’t happen without you!

Stand up and give to VOTE-COPE!



The Great Education Depression



My entire career, when asked what I do for a living I would answer with great pride that I was a “TEACHER”. Even when friends would chastise me and tell me I was crazy for spending all that time in college for such a modest salary, I was always proud to be a teacher. Usually after a string of lame jokes and one liners, a comment such as “better you than me” or “I could never spend that much time with that many children, how do you stand it” would follow. I would answer that it’s simple; you must love children and love teaching, then it will be something that you enjoy.

Things have changed over the last few years. I believe we are in the middle of a period in history that I will call The Great Education Depression. When talking to colleagues, the one constant that you hear is *being a teacher today can be very depressing*. There are so many negative forces impacting education and teaching that it is like being stuck in the rip current of a long set of waves. Each time, you swim to the surface just to be forced back to the ocean floor by another wave. This can be extremely overwhelming to even the most veteran and talented teachers and for the teachers beginning their careers it can be the impetus to leave the teaching field, long before their talent is developed.

We are all well aware of the negative forces and never-ending increase in demands that impact teaching. The list is unyielding. Unfunded federal and state mandates, severe reductions in funding, new initiatives, and new technology programs (some that are *user unfriendly*, to say the least) just to name a few. As teachers, we have become so accustomed to

increasing demands we just roll up our sleeves and as the professionals we are, tackle each new responsibility while doing our very best to give our students every opportunity for success. This has been a part of education for as long as public schools have existed, however the number and magnitude of new requirements have recently increased at an alarming rate.

The factor that I believe has had the greatest negative influence is the lack of respect and ignorant blaming of teachers and teacher unions for all of society’s ills. Lately when asked what I do for a living, I am apprehensive about sharing the fact that I am a teacher. The comments that people feel it their duty to share are negative and just plain ignorant. Comments such as “Wow you guys got it easy”, “tenure protects the bad teachers and guarantees a job for life”, “you get paid way too much

for only working 9-3 for 10 months”, are just a few of the kind words people feel it’s their “well-informed” job to share. Anti-public education and anti-union organizations have spent millions of dollars misleading the public. Unfortunately, the public has bought this load of deceit as fast as if it were a new ab machine being sold on an infomercial at 4am.

Please don’t think for a moment that I am no longer proud to be a teacher, nothing could be further from the truth. The pride I have in being a teacher grows every year. I take great pride in work and in being a member of the Valley Central Teachers’ Association. You are an amazing group of educators who truly love teaching and love children. This is evident in all

(cont’d on pg 7)

“Take the time to celebrate your successes—small and large. Each day when you see a child smile because they are successful or because the proverbial light bulb just came on, know that it is because of you.”

The Great Education Depression (from pg 6)

that you do each and every day.

As the negativity grows and starts to get you down, I would like each of us to think about why we became a teacher. I am a Physical Education Teacher. I chose this career path, not to develop the next Derek Jeter, but to make sure all of my students can step up to the plate in a backyard whiffle ball game and not strike out every at bat. I became a physical education teacher so that I could teach my students how to play volleyball well enough to enjoy a game at the family BBQ. I became a physical education teacher so that I could teach children to enjoy being physically active and in turn desire to live a healthy lifestyle. Take the time to celebrate your successes—small and large. Each day when you see a child smile because they are successful or because the proverbial light bulb just came on, know that it is because of you.

We are teachers and we take great pride in what we do each and every day. We must turn this time of The Great Education Depression into a time when we come together as a group of educators and stand up for our children. We must speak out and refuse to be silenced by the naysayers. When the negative and ignorant comments come up – SPEAK UP! We know the truth, now is the time to make it known.

The national, state, and local unions will be calling on members to show up and speak up. It may not be convenient, it may not be comfortable, but it is for our children. It is for those smiles of success today and in the future. Don't allow yourself to look back and say "I could have done more." Allow yourself to look back and say "I stood up with pride and made a difference." We make a difference in our classrooms many times each day; we can make a difference on a larger scale if we are relentless and stand proud!!!

—Rich Steger, EC Phys ED, VP VCTA

Equally Sharing the Burden (cont'd from 2)



to have all active members pay into the retirement system for the length of their careers. Spreading this cost over a 30 year career could lower the annual cost and change the perception that new teachers and new tiers al-

ways get the short end of the stick, so to speak. This might take some of the burden off not only new teachers, but districts as well. Although this is admittedly mostly a perceptual change, it also fits into our local's current philosophy of avoiding the "haves" and "have-nots."

If teachers' unions are to survive the vicious attacks being launched against them, unions must evolve to a more realistic form of unionism that considers public perception in its decisions while educating the public about the truth regarding our profession and its many responsibilities. If we are to preserve due process, retain and secure appropriate benefits, and elevate our profession, union leadership at the national, state and local levels must begin to consider which benefits are fair to all stakeholders and which are unrealistic and outdated. Evolutionary change is necessary.

—Meghan Riley, HS Soc St

Making Sense of the Dollars and Cents



Federal Level:

Schools receive federal funding in grants for disadvantaged children and children with disabilities (IDEA). Technically, there are no federal mandates that are unfunded, since each state has the option to not implement the mandate. However, when a state accepts the funding they accept the mandate.

Two years ago, the federal government gave stimulus grants to schools in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). This helped to soften the blow of state cuts.

State Level:

Typically, state aid increases each year. However since the 2008-09 school year state aid has been frozen and even slashed. For the 2010-11 school year aid was frozen and then reduced according to a GAP elimination formula. Valley Central had \$4 million less in state aid than in the 2009-10 year. This cut was lessened by the ARRA money.

Local Level:

The bottom line of a school budget is expenditure and revenue and what comes out ahead. If revenue comes out ahead, the extra money is banked in a fund balance. If expenditure comes out ahead, then the fund balance is tapped to make up the difference.

Last year, revenue beat expenditure by \$1.6 million dollars and the fund balance went from \$14.7 million to \$16.3 million.

The Fund Balance:

The fund balance is divided into 3 different parts. Some are reserved for certain functions such as tax appraisal challenges. Other parts of the can be accessed and appropriated as needed. Appropriating the fund balance means it is intended to be used to balance the proposed budget. If the revenue equals or exceeds expenditure, then the appropriated amount is unneeded and is left in the fund balance. It is only used if needed.

The Tax Levy Cap Bill

This bill was penned by the Governor and passed by the NYS Senate. It awaits passage at the Assembly level. *Write to your legislators at NYSUT's Legislative Action Center.*

- It would take effect for the 2012-13 year.
- The vote would be on the tax levy, not the proposed budget.
- Any levy from 0% to 2% can be passed with a simple majority vote of the voters.
- A tax levy higher than 2% would take a "super majority" (60% of the voters +1 more)
- If a vote fails, it can be put up for a re-vote, but must be put up at 0%.

VC Budget Discussions 2011-12

A school budget must be balanced. The revenue and the expenditure must balance. VC is projecting an \$86 million expenditure budget. The total revenue budget projected is \$79 million.

Three areas of revenue sources:

State Aid

The state aid remained the same and then it was slashed \$6.8 million with the GAP elimination. That means our state aid for next year is \$28 million.

Tax Levy

This year any tax levy could be proposed as part of the entire budget package and passed by a simple majority vote. The district is proposing a **4%** tax levy increase.

Fund Balance

The district is proposing using \$3 million from the fund balance. In order to balance the revenue and the expenditure, the district is now proposing \$5 million in cuts as well.

What could change?

State Aid could be increased by the Legislature, the District could propose a higher tax levy and use more fund balance.

HV Area Labor Federation Solidarity Speech

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters in the labor movement! We are gathered today at the Teamster’s Hall to stand together as one showing our support for those in Wisconsin whose basic bargaining rights are currently being threatened by an uncompromising governor, who, despite concessions from public employees on wages, pensions, and healthcare costs, still refuses to accept a principle as old as the labor movement itself, the right to sit down with management and negotiate fair contracts! Given the governor’s attitude, is it any wonder that unions are needed now more than ever?

Today we send a message to those public and private employees in Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, and the rest of the nation that New York’s Hudson River Valley is with you in seeing that justice is done and that democracy is served when those bosses

in government and private industry recognize that their own interests do not supersede those who work on their behalf. We push back against those who would like to see a closing chapter on the role of unions in America, whether they be Scott Walker, Andrew Cuomo, or Michael Bloomberg! Fellow NYSUT members, CWA workers, CSEA colleagues, PEF friends, building tradesmen, and guests, let me be clear about what we face and what we need to do.

One hundred and five years ago, Populist and Democratic presidential candidate, William Jennings Bryan, delivered his famous “Cross of Gold” Speech. At that time wealthy businessmen favored the gold standard because it enhanced their fortunes at the expense of hard-working farmers. The times have changed but some things remain. Then, as



“Those in power, then as well as now, are out to destroy our nation’s unions so they can “cut costs” and save the taxpayers money. Who are the taxpayers? We are! We work and pay our taxes to build a better life for our families and our children!”

now, big business and its allies favored labor policies that give workers little or no voice in the decision-making process. It is much easier to dictate terms and conditions than to negotiate for them! Those in power, then as well as now, are out to destroy our nation’s unions so they can “cut

costs” and save the taxpayers money. Who are the taxpayers? We are! We work and pay our taxes to build a better life for our families and our children!

Workers of America did not cause this crisis! The economic collapse of 2007-2008 was caused by greedy Wall Street investors who gambled and lost; not one of those criminals has gone to jail over the damage they caused! Make no mistake about what’s happening in America. We- teachers, clerks, nurses, utility workers, psychologists, and DPW employees are being scapegoated by some businessmen, state and national politicians, who, after speculators bankrupted the economy, see an opportunity to put the blame on public employees for their salaries, pensions, and healthcare plans so they can back out of their commitment to *(continued on page 10)*

HV Area Labor Federation Solidarity Speech(from 10)

those who do the public's work! And to make matters worse, potential Republican presidential candidate Newt Gingrich floated a proposal to change federal laws so that states could declare bankruptcy, thus allowing them to void their past and future financial obligations to us and those who came before us!

Brothers and sisters, today is the day when we send our message to those who seek to rob us of our livelihood. The right to bargain with management is and should be a democratic process. Bosses who dictate terms and conditions of employment endanger their own success and the lives of their employees. Does anyone here remember the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire? The 100th anniversary comes up this March 25th. Because they lost their demand to form a union, 146 people, mostly teenagers, the age of most kids I teach, died on the factory floor or

died jumping out the windows when they could not escape the flames because several doors were locked from the outside by the factory owners. Can we go back to the days when managers and their agents do whatever they want with us? No! Will we sit by and allow politicians and their allies in the conservative press to take away or limit our right to negotiate those conditions and benefits under which we work and fought so hard to achieve? No! Governors, you got problems? Go after the guilty first then talk to us, but NOT before! Everybody, please, stand up, stay strong, and unite! With your voices let those in Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, Washington D.C., and Albany hear you! Thank you all for coming today!

—Paul Ellis-Graham, President, HVALF



New financial education services offer something for everyone

If you're looking for information on financial services available to you as a NYSUT member, NYSUT Member Benefits may have something just for you. Considerable efforts have been put forth in creating new printed material as well as new presentations. Both in-service and retiree members can benefit.

403(b) Field Guide. This booklet covers all aspects of 403(b) plans and includes information pertinent to members not yet contributing to a 403(b) plan, those who are contributing, those nearing retirement, and those already enjoying retirement.

To get the free guide, you can view and print a copy from the Member Benefits website, www.memberbenefits.nysut.org, hit the "Contact" option on the site to send an e-mail request, or call **800-626-8101** for a copy to be sent to you.

403(b) Provider-Specific Workshop. Member Benefits contracted with the provider of its endorsed Financial Counseling Program, Stacey Braun Associates, Inc., to conduct these workshops upon request from local leaders. The workshop covers detailed information on five 403(b) providers chosen by the local leader from a list of 10 popular 403(b) providers. Workshops review the features of each plan, comparing fees and benefits. These workshops are designed for in-service members.

For information about these programs or about contractual endorsement arrangements with providers of endorsed programs, please contact NYSUT Member Benefits.

Agency fee payers to NYSUT are eligible to participate in NYSUT Member Benefits-endorsed programs.

Workshops have a registration fee of \$20 per participant and a minimum requirement of 30 participants. A local could schedule this workshop as a webinar for a fee of \$250.

Workshops will not address specific questions pertaining to an individual's 403(b) plan. Members with questions regarding personal 403(b) accounts or other financial planning issues will be directed

to speak with their 403(b) adviser or their financial planner. For those who don't have an adviser or planner, information on the endorsed Financial Counseling Program will also be available.



Financial Planning Puzzle Workshop. Today's economy has clarified the need for a financial plan; unfortunately, for many, beginning a financial plan remains a daunting task.

This two-hour workshop, designed for in-service members, outlines the process, covering cash management, risk management, savings, retirement and estate planning.

The Challenging Times of Financial Management – The Retirement Years. Financial planning doesn't stop at retirement. This one-hour presentation discusses the various investment options you may face during retirement along with helpful information regarding your 403(b) plan, Social Security benefits, income taxes and more.

**MEMBER
BENEFITS**
nysut
Working to Benefit You

Speakers at Solidarity Rally to Support Wisconsin Workers; March 3, 2011



Valley Central Teachers' Association Members Support Wisconsin & Collective Bargaining