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# Rallies for Labor, in Wisconsin and Beyond

By RICHARD A. OPPEL Jr. and TIMOTHY WILLIAMS

MADISON, Wis. — With booming chants of “This will not stand!” at least 70,000 demonstrators flooded the square around the Wisconsin Capitol on Saturday in what the authorities here called the largest protest yet in nearly two weeks of demonstrations.

It was a call heard in sympathy protests that drew thousands of demonstrators to state capitals and other cities from Albany to the West Coast.

The protesters were rallying against a proposal by Wisconsin’s new Republican governor, [Scott Walker](#), that would strip the state’s public employee unions of nearly all their bargaining power and impose sizable take-home pay cuts by diverting more of their paychecks to finance health care and pension plans.

“We’ve had bargaining for 50 years, and he wants to end it in a week,” Al Alt, who has taught school for four decades in Waukesha, Wis., said as he paused on a bench after marching around the Capitol with other protesters.

A spokesman for the Madison police, Joel DeSpain, who provided the crowd estimate, said there had been no arrests during the rally.

The demonstrators in Madison were loud but peaceful, according to the Madison police.

But there was unease and confusion over the fate of the hundreds of people who have spent every night in the hallways, stairwells and public areas of the Capitol and have become the heart of the protest movement. State officials have said they would be evicted on Sunday afternoon.

“There will be no more sleeping over in the Capitol” beginning at 4 p.m. Sunday, Jodi Jensen, a senior official at the Department of Administration, the state agency that includes the Capitol police, said in an interview.

After that, she said, the building would be open during normal daily hours and closed at night. She said the decision was made because of health and safety concerns and that Mr. Walker did not influence the move as far as she knew.

Some union officials and protesters said the evictions could lead to conflict. “It’s a bit confusing,” said Alex Hanna, co-president of the Teaching Assistants’ Association.

Later, Jim Palmer, the leader of a large law enforcement union, said that he had been told that the Capitol Police were backing away from the eviction plan.

“Now it sounds like they are going to let people stay,” said Mr. Palmer, whose union, the Wisconsin Professional Police Association, has 11,000 members. The police, he said, might only ask for people to “voluntarily comply” with requests to leave the building. He added that his union and other labor leaders had urged their members to comply with whatever the police asked.

“We don’t want anything to happen to create a blemish on what has been a model for civil discourse,” Mr. Palmer said. The Capitol Police referred all inquiries to the Department of Administration.

Two protesters, Alexandra and Alison Port, twins who attend the [University of Wisconsin](#), were turned away Saturday because they were carrying sleeping bags as they tried to enter the Capitol. If people are evicted Sunday, the twins said, the protesters will circle the building holding hands.

Mr. Walker's plan is far from the only proposal to curb union power, and crowds of teachers, firefighters and other public workers held rallies Saturday in cities from Albany and Miami to Olympia, Wash.

"This is a national issue," Jim Goodnow, who attended the demonstration in Miami, where about 150 people rallied at Bayfront Park. Many of them said they were concerned that Gov. [Rick Scott](#), a Republican, might try to strip away the few protections that unions have in Florida. A bill in the Legislature would block union dues from being automatically deducted from paychecks.

Still, the revolt in Wisconsin has become the main stage for arguments on both sides. Mr. Walker and other Republicans say the changes are necessary to put the state back on solid financial footing and to prevent wide-scale layoffs.

The protesters and Wisconsin's Democratic leaders — including 14 state senators who are hiding out in Illinois to prevent a vote on Mr. Walker's proposal — say the bill is an attempt to use fiscal problems to deal a crippling blow to the unions that are traditional Republican opponents.

Democrats from the Indiana House of Representatives also remained sequestered in Illinois on Saturday to avoid being forced by the State Police to attend a legislative session on a bill that would limit unions.

Although the Wisconsin protests have been peaceful, they have also reflected a strong personal dislike for Mr. Walker, who was elected in November, and many of the placards criticized his relationship with Charles G. and [David H. Koch](#), the billionaire brothers who bankroll conservative causes and Republican campaigns, including Mr. Walker's race. "We will not tolerate Koch heads in Wisconsin," one said.

The largest unions have said they would agree to the benefit changes that Mr. Walker is seeking. State officials have said that the resulting cut in take-home pay could be 6 to 8 percent for the typical state worker. But for many lower-income state workers, the proposal would mean cuts in take-home pay of

more than 10 percent.

*Richard A. Oppel Jr. reported from Madison, Wis., and Timothy Williams from New York.*

*Erik Bojnansky contributed reporting from Miami.*



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