

Dateline Madison, February 26, 2011

In solidarity with the labor struggle, WAMM Board member Sue Ann Martinson went to Madison on February 26th with WAMM Director Kim Doss Smith, Veterans for Peace member Patrick Doss Smith, and WAMM intern Eliza Summerlin. On-the-ground report from Sue Ann Martinson:

Thousands upon thousands march by. We are on the street that surrounds the Capitol. The signs: "It's About Freedom—ASCME." My favorite. Then SEIU, AFL-CIO, many more unions. Someone on the side yells, "Chicago," and many marchers respond. They just keep marching. Thousands more are on the Capitol lawn. I am leafleting for the mobilization against the war that will be held in New York City on April 9. On the street, you can hear the sound of bagpipes. Firefighters from all over Wisconsin weigh in, with signs for Marshfield and Waukesha and other Wisconsin towns. The bagpipers wear kilts, and those around me start chanting, "Thank you!"

Signs are everywhere calling for recall of Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker. People chant, "Scott Walker has got to go," or "Kill the Bill," or "I say 'Union,' you say 'Power.'" Mothers and fathers with young children in strollers walk by everywhere. Some people chant, "What does democracy look like? This is what democracy looks like." The mood is ebullient. A cross-section of the people of America passes before my eyes. During the rally, chanting "United We Stand" with thousands of people gives me chills, good chills. And it is not from the cold, although it is cold but not below zero. Sometime in the afternoon it starts to snow. Which stops no one.

A man hands me a leaflet. "Stop Honeywell's War on Workers." And I find out that "Honeywell's Metropolis Works plant in Illinois is the only uranium conversion facility in the U.S. The plant receives radioactive uranium and uses millions of pounds of deadly chemicals... to prepare it for use in nuclear fuel." Their union has been locked out since June. Honeywell has brought in union busters, and scabs to handle the deadly materials.

Now people are being allowed inside the Capitol building, but everyone is getting checked first and there is an hour's wait or longer to get in. But it doesn't matter. Being outside is powerful and moving and oh, the people, or as Walt Whitman would say, "the people, yes!" At state capitols around the country at noon on this day, thousands gather in solidarity with the people of Wisconsin. Estimates are that at least 100,000 rallied in Madison, with some estimates substantially higher. Thousands also rallied in cities around the country, including 1,000 at the Capitol building in St. Paul. And even in conservative Texas and Virginia (400 in Richmond), people gathered in solidarity. Some call the power of Madison a wake-up call for people all over America.

By the time you are reading this report, there will have been other developments in Madison and also more results from the power of the people in Wisconsin, as the

governors and politicians of others states look on. When thousands of people singing the national anthem held the free on the “land of the free” as a powerful and long sustained note, it brought tears to the eyes of many. To be in the heart of that nonviolent and somehow orderly yet chaotic movement, is unforgettable in a time when hope in this country is taking a battering. To be part of all that was, and is, hopeful beyond words.