WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR
DAVE HANSEN
SENATOR – 30TH DISTRICT
ASSISTANT MAJORITY LEADER

Labor History
Assembly Bill 172 Senate Bill 135
Committee Testimony
Senate Committee on Education
7-9-09

Thank you Mister Chairman and members of the committee. I am here to testify in favor of Senate Bill 135 and Assembly Bill 172 which would require the teaching of the history of organized labor and the collective bargaining process in the state's public schools.

These bills have been around for awhile. I've been an author of the bill since 2001 when the bill passed the Senate but died in the Assembly. I believe the Chair was the author before that.

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Assembly Bill 172 passed the Assembly on a bipartisan vote (61-38) on April 28th. AB-172 was amended by the author, Representative Andy Jorgensen and Representative Leah Vukmir to require the state superintendent to incorporate the history of organized labor and the collective bargaining process into the model academic standards for social studies. I am supportive of this change and ask the committee to support it as well so we can concur and get this bill to the Governor for his final approval.

My understanding of the difference between the Senate Bill and the Assembly Bill, as amended, is that AB-172 no longer mandates that school districts develop an instructional program but requires students to know and give evidence that they know something of this subject on standardized tests. School districts will be given more flexibility in deciding what is to be taught on the subject.

We've all seen the bumper sticker, "Unions: The Folks Who Brought You the Weekend". It's humorous but I think this bumper sticker identifies what the history of labor is all about. We have to remember how we got here. The eight hour day and forty hour week are things we take for granted today, but they did not come without enormous sacrifices on the part of working men and women. And it's not just the eight hour workday or forty hour work week. Unions fought hard for unemployment insurance, overtime pay, workers compensation, safety regulations, and more. None of these victories came without a struggle.

Wisconsin has a long, proud and sometimes tragic labor history. It is important that we remember the sacrifices our parents, grandparents and great grandparents made.

As a new generation enters the workforce, they will face new challenges. Globalization, downsizing, and temporary

work – these are some of the issues that our new generation of workers will find and they need to know their history before they enter into these new struggles.

Professor James Green of the University of Massachusetts pointed out that the greatest value to teaching the history of organized labor is that it teaches the history of ordinary citizens achieving extraordinary things, and that's the inspiration we must pass on to our young people.

That is my hope for passing this legislation, that through the teaching of labor history our state's students will understand what the working men and women who came before us have achieved for us all. Thank you Mr. Chairman and members. I would be happy to answer any questions.

STATE REPRESENTATIVE
ANDY JORGENSEN

A voice for the 37th Assembly District, serving Jefferson & Dane Counties

Testimony of AB 172 to the Senate Committee on Education
7.9.09

First of all, thank you for all of those supporting this bill, the brothers and sisters who have perished in the labor movement would commend your support to memorialize the sacrifices they have undergone. This bill was passed through the State Assembly in a strong bipartisan fashion with a vote of 61-38.

Wisconsin has a rich tradition of labor history and we should be proud of our contributions to the labor movement. On May Day in 1886 the Bay View Massacre in Milwaukee demonstrated how 15,000 workers could organize and secure an eight-hour work day. Another historic event was the infamous sit-in at the Janesville General Motors Plant in 1937. About 3,000 GM workers sealed up the plant to change the status quo and give future workers, like me, a fair shake. As an employee of GM, I am grateful for their actions and the lasting changes they made for the labor movement. These footnotes in history are not just events without meaning; these events are the solid foundation of a workers' ability to organize and obtain safe, gainful employment. Children must also know that the labor movement did not just help unions, it helped all workers!

We are here today to make sure these events in the labor movement are not lost. By voting for AB 172, we will ensure children understand why we can read bed-time stories at night because of the eight-hour work day. Or why we can watch our children score the winning goal at soccer games on the weekend. But the most important thing our children will know is how far people went to secure the privileges and rights we have today.

Fortunately there are some school districts already teaching the history of labor, but this bill would specify that the state model academic standards would incorporate the history of the labor movement. This does not force school districts to teach this subject, but it shows a commitment of the state to weave the history of the labor movement into public education.

During hearings and executive sessions in the Assembly, there were a few concerns raised and I would like to take the time to tackle them.

First of all, some people have concerns that this bill only allows educators to talk about labor history in a positive light. History needs to be taught objectively, American history would not be as rich without talking about the low and high points.

Other folks have implied that this is "unfunded mandate." That is just not the case: this is direction, not a mandate. This bill gives schools the freedom to develop their own curriculum relating to labor history. In addition to the leniency of this bill, it also has very little, if any fiscal impact.

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Another concern was that this bill may start a cascade of bills relating to the educational requirements. Some folks in the committee said there have never been any changes such as this in the statutes. It is true that there have been no changes such as this, but the statutes have defined education requirements before. To say that we have never changed the statutes would be absurd because in 2005, the Legislature passed a bill to teach abstinence as the preferred choice of behavior for all pupils. There was no cascade of specifications to the statutes and to say that this will create a slippery slope of new educational requirements is a farce.

This bill is simple…teach our youth the history of labor and the collective bargaining process. Now, more than ever, in these uncertain times, we need to remember and learn from the labor movement. We need to take a moment to teach our students about the hardships of the workers. And we need to remind our youth that the current working conditions did not just happen, they were created by individuals who fought hard for them. Many workers died for these rights and we must remember. After all, as they say, if we fail to understand our past, we will be doomed to repeat it.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my support for this important bill.

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Tony Evers, PhD, State Superintendent

Date: July 9, 2009

To: Members, Senate Committee on Education

From: Jennifer Kammerud, Legislative Liaison

Subject: **Testimony on 2009 Senate Bill 135 and Assembly Bill 172**

Thank you to Chairperson Lehman and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Jennifer Kammerud and I am the legislative liaison for the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). On behalf of State Superintendent Tony Evers I am here to testify in support of the SB 135 and AB 172.

Current law requires that each school board provide an instructional program that gives students knowledge of state, national and world history. The department also has model academic standards for social studies that are tested at grades four, eight, and ten. Labor history is not a separately identified element in the social studies standards but it is related to some of our content standards (see attached).

While the department supports both bills, I should note that we are also comfortable with Assembly Substitute Amendment 2 to AB 172, which would clarify that the history of organized labor and the collective bargaining process is clearly incorporated into the model academic standards for social studies. The substitute amendment would provide a broader scope of coursework through which school districts would be able to teach aspects of this subject, but it would also be more costly, as we would need to revise our standards and develop related test items.

In order to support school districts, the Department of Public Instruction did develop a package of lessons and resources, called Lessons in Labor History, to assist teachers. At this time, however, we do not have a dedicated staff person to support social studies in Wisconsin due to the state hiring freeze. As a result, it is unclear as to any additional support we may be able to provide school districts or, if AB 172 were to become law as amended, the timeline under which we would be able to revise our social studies standards to incorporate the history of organized labor and the collective bargaining process.

It is important for students to learn about the history of organized labor and the collective bargaining process as prescribed in these bills. The history of the American and Wisconsin labor movement is not the study of a single organization or an individual. It is, rather, the study of the enormous social and economic forces that have shaped today's workplace and the difficult struggles and history behind the rights and privileges of workers attained over time.

Thank you. At this time I would be happy to take any questions you may have.

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Social Studies Standards Related to Labor History

Content Standard B: History: Time, Continuity, and Change
FOURTH-TWELFTH GRADE: Historical Eras and Themes
While studying Wisconsin history, students in grades 4-12 will learn about:

- mining, lumber, and agriculture
- La Follette and the Progressive Era, 1874-1914
- prosperity, depression, industrialization, and urbanization

FIFTH-TWELFTH GRADE: Historical Eras and Themes
While studying United States history, students in grades 5-12 will learn about:

- the growth of industrialization and urbanization, 1865-1914
- World War I and America's emergence as a world power, 1890-1920
- prosperity, depression, and the New Deal, 1920-1941

FIFTH-TWELFTH GRADE: Historical Eras and Themes
While studying world history, students in grades 5-12 will learn about:

- global encounters, industrialization, urbanization, and imperialism, 1850-1914 AD
- wars, revolutions, and ideologies, 1900-1945 AD
- post-industrialism, global interdependence, and fragmentation in the contemporary world, 1945-present

Performance Standards, by the end of grade 12, students will:
B.12.9 Select significant changes caused by technology, industrialization, urbanization, and population growth, and analyze the effects of these changes in the United States and the world

Content Standard D: Economics
Performance Standards - Grade 4
D.4.4 Give examples to explain how businesses and industry depend upon workers with specialized skills to make production more efficient

Performance Standards - Grade 8
D.8.10 Identify the economic roles of institutions such as corporations and businesses, banks, labor unions, and the Federal Reserve System

Performance Standards - Grade 12
D.12.4 Explain and evaluate the effects of new technology, global economic interdependence, and competition on the development of national policies and on the lives of individuals and families in the United States and the world

Labor History in the Schools (Senate Bill 135 and Assembly Bill 172)

Testimony before Wisconsin State Senate Committee on Education
July 9, 2009

From Steven Cupery, President, Wisconsin Labor History Society, 6333 W. Bluemound Rd., Milwaukee WI 53213, 414-771-0700x20, info@wisconsinlaborhistory.org

Committee Chair Lehman and committee members: I wish to thank the committee for scheduling this hearing on Senate Bill 135 and Assembly Bill 172 which will require our schools to teach about labor unions, workers, their history and the collective bargaining process. The Wisconsin Labor History Society has come before the legislature on several occasions asking for support of this measure. The time for action is now, and there is no better time. With our economy in disarray, it is very important for our children to fully appreciate the gains their parents and grandparents have made for them.

According the 1920 census more than one million children between the ages of 10 and 15 were not in school learning about history and social studies, rather they were employed. Asa Candler, the founder of Coca Cola has been widely quoted as having said: "The most beautiful sight that we see is the child at labor...As early as he may get at labor the more beautiful, the more useful does his life get to be." As we now know their lives were far from beautiful. At the time they worked in mills, mines, and factories under conditions that included long hours, in dangerous and unhealthy environments and for miserable pay. Prior to World War I, and before the significant organization of workers in the 1930's, there was wide spread poverty and inequality. At this time when the poverty level for a family of four was $900 a year, the average worker was making $400. This inequality reached its pinnacle in 1929.

With passage of the Wagner Act in 1935 and the legal protections that followed, workers were able to organize, and helped put an end to this exploitation. Workers learned that they could alter the balance the power possessed by captains of industry through collective bargaining with their employers. By working collectively in unions, workers helped to pass legislation that brought major improvements to the lives of all American workers. Unions in Wisconsin and throughout the nation did not limit their efforts to narrow self-interest. Far from being an exclusive club, they sought to improve workers' lives, job and income security by working for the passage of legislation limiting child labor, bringing about the eight hour work day, fair labor

standards, unemployment and workers' compensation insurance, Social Security and Medicare. Union contracts set the pace for non-union employers by bargaining health insurance, retirement plans, paid holidays, sick leave, and vacations. These accomplishments over the past 75 years may be taken for granted by those who are unaware that these gains were negotiated and won by our predecessors.

Why is it necessary to require school districts to include the teaching of labor history and collective bargaining in our schools? So that the younger generation does not take these hard-won achievements for granted. Even though unions represent over 375,000 workers in Wisconsin, we hear few facts about the positive achievements unions have made to our current standards of living and way of life. From time to time I am asked to make presentations to college kids about unions and collective bargaining. I am constantly reminded of the significant number of students who have heard few facts about unions, and who have acquired only cursory negative stereotypes of "union bosses". These students are surprised to learn that without a union contract, employees remain "at will" and can be fired for simply asking individually for improvements in pay and benefits. After learning more about the role of negotiated union contracts, I have found that previously disinterested students are eager to learn about "just cause" protection against unfair discipline and discharge, and how legally binding contracts and grievance procedures further protect employees' rights to bargain and engage in legal protected concerted activity.

Unions and collective bargaining remain the most important voluntary method of maintaining our democracy and a viable middle class. Just as the state legislature is critical to democracy in our government, collective bargaining and unions are critical to democracy in our workplace. It is no coincidence that as the number of union members has declined so too has the middle class. Income and wealth inequality have grown and both threaten our democracy and civilized society. According to the Congressional Budget Office, in the past twenty-five years, the average after tax income of the top 1 percent of households has doubled. During this same time period the middle fifth of households has seen their incomes go up less than one percentage point per year. Despite our current hard economic times, CEO's continue to pocket large pay packages. In 2007 S&P 500 CEOs averaged $10.5 million a year, 344 times the pay of typical American workers. Pay levels for private investment fund managers soared even further. In 2007, the top 50 hedge and private equity fund managers averaged $588 million each, more than 19,000 times the pay

earned by the typical U.S. worker. Looking back many of us are asking just what did they produce for all that money?

An important aspect of collective bargaining is that it provides workers with greater power in decisions over the distribution of earnings and revenue. It does so by giving employees a voice in decisions that affect their economic lives. Employees have the right to information so that they can make informed decisions at the bargaining table. Collective bargaining is also about establishing rights in the workplace that permit employees to bargain without the fear of being terminated. These are important tools that our young people should be aware of when they venture out into the employment market.

Both Senate Bill 135 and Assembly Bill 172 are seeking to fill this knowledge gap about the history of workers, the reasons they sought to organize, and their achievements both legislatively and at the bargaining table. Implementation of these bills will give students important knowledge about their personal rights when seeking employment. It will instruct them on how collective bargaining is a check and balance in an industrial society where employers are very well organized.

We know that historically, school boards have opposed the requirements of these bills as being another mandate. Such opposition ignores an important part of American history, which has contributed to our culture and our national identity. We believe that teachers will meet that challenge of incorporating this content into their curriculum. Excellent teachers are constantly adapting their curriculum to reflect the needs of the DPI, students, parents, future employers and their communities. The additional cost is minimal. The Department of Public Instruction has a curriculum ready for 4th graders, 8th graders and 11th graders that complies with state standards. They can be downloaded for free right now on our website, http://wisconsinlaborhistory.org .

Today's youth are facing important challenges. The standard of living we have enjoyed for decades is being threatened. It is important that our youth are equipped with the lessons of history and economics that are embodied in the experiences of Wisconsin and American workers. For all these reasons we ask that you support Senate Bill 135 and Assembly Bill 172.

Wisconsin State AFL-CIO ...the voice for working families.

David Newby, President • Sara J. Rogers, Exec. Vice President • Phillip L. Neuenfeldt, Secretary-Treasurer

TO: Members of the Senate Education Committee
FROM: David Newby, President
DATE: July 9, 2009
RE: Labor History in the Schools: SB 135/AB172

Of all states in America, you would think that the history of organized labor would be prominently taught in Wisconsin classrooms. After all, in 1898, when woodworkers in Oshkosh went on strike for decent wages and safe working conditions, it was Clarence Darrow who defended their leaders against charges of conspiracy. Luckily he won that case, because if the case had been lost, strikes would have been illegal and their leaders subject to draconian jail sentences.

Then in 1911, it was the Wisconsin Legislature that passed the first Workers Compensation bill in the United States, establishing a "no fault" system which guaranteed that any worker injured on the job would have their medical care paid for and would receive some compensation for lost wages. That system was so successful that it was eventually copied in some form by every state in the union.

In 1932, Wisconsin once again led the way when it passed the first Unemployment Insurance bill in the United States. Our system of providing at least some income to the unemployed proved to be so effective in the early years of the Depression that this program too was copied in other states and then by Congress in 1935.

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More recently, Wisconsin was one of the first states to pass a Family and Medical Leave law. Once again, other states followed our lead and eventually a federal Family and Medical Leave Act was passed by Congress in 1993.

But don't they teach these things any longer? you might ask? Actually, no they don't. If you look at the dominant American history text books, they might have half a dozen paragraphs out of 300 pages on the history of labor and unions (and most often it centers on the United Farm Workers and the grape boycott of the early 1970's, interestingly enough!).

Why? Well, partly, no doubt, due to the right-ward shift of the politics of our country in the past 25 years. But also due to the structure of the national textbook market. The two biggest markets for textbooks (chosen by a state level government panel) are Texas and California--both dominated by conservative (and generally anti-union) boards. If a textbook is rejected by these state boards, then the publisher will find it difficult to sell enough copies of that textbook in other states to make a profit. So the politics of these two state school boards essentially determine the content and politics of textbooks that are used in the rest of the United States.

So all Sen. Hansen and Representative Jorgensen's bill asks is that the history of labor and unions be given its due and the history of our country by taught accurately. The Department of Public Instruction has extensive resources online for teachers to use--so no extra training of teachers is necessary. Moreover, the bill does not specify how much attention has to be given to labor history in our classrooms. Finally, the American Labor Studies Center (on whose Board I serve) has a wealth of information and lesson plans online that teachers can use. I would urge anyone interested in this issue to check

out their website: www.labor-studies.org. There you will find not only Wisconsin's "Lessons in Labor History", developed in cooperation with the Department of Public Instruction, but also, for example, three 55 minute programs on the rise of organized labor from the Library of Congress, a section on "Using Songs to Teach Labor History", an instructional unit "Hardball and Handshakes" on the history of labor relations in Major League Baseball and how collective bargaining developed in this "industry".

We ask for your support of SB 135/AB 172 not so that unions can be glorified (our shortcomings should be taught as well), but so that an important dimension of our history, the story of how ordinary working people have banded together to improve their lives and the lives of their families, their children and their grandchildren, will be taught appropriately in our schools. There are important lessons to be learned from this history, and our children should know them.

Timothy S. Deneen (312), Director
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united transportation union

Wisconsin Legislative Board

09 July 2009 6337.09

The Wisconsin Legislative Board of the United Transportation Union represents operating crew members of the Class I railroads in Wisconsin.

We fully support the goals of AB 172. AS 8 135

The Railroad Brotherhoods are some of the oldest labor organizations in America's proud tradition of collective action for the benefit of the whole. Over the years, our members have benefited with family supporting jobs, heath care, and an excellent retirement system.

We continue today to work with management and federal and state agencies with goals of reducing risks for our members, railroad employees, and the general public. Our success has resulted in productivity gains and increased efficiencies for the Carriers.

Knowledge sparks interest and debate. This in turn opens doors that expose students to new ideas and challenges many of the stereotypes.

Understanding our history is essential to understanding our system, and the successes and failures that took place along the way. There is no way to understand the middle class in America without understanding the part played by labor organizations. The checks and balance that labor organizations provide are beneficial to all parties involved.

As a third generation railroad employee/union member, I am proud to be able to provide for my family. As a union representative I am proud to be part of a democratic organization that works for the betterment of all workers and working families. I believe in the cornerstones of integrity, dignity, honesty, and respect.

Please support AB 172.

Thank you,

Tim

Tim Deneen
State Director