



Tom Morello: Union Booster

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Musician Tom Morello is putting his money where his mouth is — literally. The Rage Against the Machine and Audioslave guitarist is donating all profits [from his new CD, “Union Town,”](#) to benefit the America Votes Labor Unity Fund, which supports labor organizations around the country. Morello was inspired by his visit to Madison, Wis., during February’s labor protests.

POLITICO spoke with Morello about the ongoing fight there.

Morello: I’ve been very involved in labor issues for decades. For 22 years, I’ve been a member of Los Angeles [Professional] Musicians Local 47. I’m a red-card-carrying member of the IWW [Industrial Workers of the World], and my mom was a public high school teacher in a small town in Illinois for almost 30 years. And while we never had a lot of money, we always had enough food on the table and clothes on our back because my mom was a union high school teacher.

So when I saw the news reports that Wisconsin was trying to roll back decades of social progress by stripping public employees of their ability to collectively bargain, I took it very personally.

POLITICO: What’s at play in Wisconsin: Is Gov. Scott Walker doing what he says — just trying to save money — or is there more of a philosophical conflict taking place?

Morello: I don’t think it’s so much a philosophical conflict as it is an effort to bust unions, not just in Wisconsin, but to start the dominoes falling to break unionism in the United States. The governor and his billionaire cronies and his other right-wing governor pals have a clear agenda: They want to make this a country of the corporations, by the corporations, for the corporations. And to that end, they have to strip the unions of their ability to be the counterbalance to the raw, corporate greed that torpedoed our economy, is threatening our environment and is savagely attacking a century of hard-fought social progress.

POLITICO: Is there anything that unions can do to help their negotiating position in this debate?

Morello: The first thing they need to do is listen to the people in the unions themselves, and that’s what they’ve begun to do. While unions spearheaded the demonstrations in Madison, it really was a spontaneous uprising, the likes [of which] I haven’t seen — they’re the biggest demonstrations since the Vietnam War era. ... It’s my hope that this is a watershed moment in U.S. labor history. This can be the moment where unions get their teeth back, where young people realize that where they have power in this country is by standing shoulder to shoulder with their fellow workers. That’s the one thing most of us have in common: We work for a living. ... It’s my job to stand where I work as a guitar player, as a singer, as a songwriter to help steel the backbone of this movement with my music.

POLITICO: What would you like to see out of the Democratic leadership in Washington?

Morello: Scott Walker hasn't won sh*t. ... While he did pull some legislative trickery, this battle is far from over.

The White House has been strangely quiet on this issue. Originally, there was sort of a statement of support, but during the campaign I remember distinctly, as [Barack Obama] was marching through the states, he said he'd be standing shoulder to shoulder with the workers in their states. And their shoulders are waiting right now, so come on down.

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