

Joel Rogers' response to March 17th *Isthmus* article

March 20, 2010

To the Editor:

Alison Bauter's "Labor expert: Focus on the ballot box" (*Isthmus*, 3/17/2011) may give readers a misimpression of my views on present struggles in Wisconsin. I write to clarify.

I do believe that retiring David Prosser April 5 and recalling at least three Republican state Senators soon afterward are vital tasks that command our immediate attention. I also believe that wide economic disruption (a "general strike") carries clear risks and requires much prior organization to succeed. But I do not believe that electoral action alone, much less simply swapping out a few Republicans for Democrats, will fix Wisconsin politics. Nor do I reject without consideration *any* proposal for nonviolent action that might. We are in the fight of our lives. Outside violence, we cannot afford to bar any holds.

I have this view because I take Walker, Prosser, Fitzgerald(s) & Co. to be made men of a well-resourced, well-organized, and lethal political project that goes well beyond wrecking unions and schools, inflicting pain upon the poor, and otherwise debasing a single state or group of states. As explained by Grover Norquist and Karl Rove, this project aims at national repeal of most of democratic achievements of the 20th century, a return to business domination of public life not seen since the Gilded Age and McKinley, and whatever constraints on popular action are needed to make that domination permanent. In short, to reverse and then halt the progress of democracy in America.

I find it this project repulsive, and close to treason. I believe it is the duty of each generation of Americans to move the reality of this country closer to, not further from, its radical founding ideal: democracy, a self-governing community of free equals. That work was declared by Lincoln at Gettysburg as the enduring "task before us." James Baldwin called it the work of "achieving" our country. I know no better definition of our jobs as citizens.

Those who disagree are obviously winning, however, until recently with little popular resistance. What can we do about this? First and last, I think, build a mass democratic movement, not just a moment — an organized people force as strong, determined, and savvy as the organized money force that wants to kill us. This movement should be independent, not controlled by politicians. It should be open in its debate and decision making. It should say what it's for as well as against. And it needs a name, one name, so that its diverse organizational and individual members can easily signal their shared conviction and solidarity to each other and the world. That's all, and all that's possible. We just need to get started in earnest. And we can start that now, without forgetting, in the next few weeks, to collect the recall signatures and get out the anti-Prosser vote.

Sincerely,



Joel Rogers

identification purposes only - Professor of Law, Political Science, Public Affairs & Sociology, UW-Madison; Director, COWS **contact** - jrogers60@gmail.com or 608-890-2543