

Michigan goes right-to-work (for less)

Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder and most of his fellow Republicans in the state legislature pulled a fast one in December.

After years of saying he wasn't interested in "right-to-work" legislation, Snyder suddenly said he would sign a right-to-work law after meeting in private with Republican leaders of the Michigan House and Senate, and he called on the legislature, which was meeting in a lame-duck session, to fast-track the legislation.

The reaction from Michigan workers was swift. In a scene that resembled recent struggles over anti-labor laws in Wisconsin and several other states, an estimated 10,000 union members and workers' rights advocates rallied against the legislation. Police barred most of them from entering the state capitol. Police also used pepper spray against protestors inside the building, and arrested several.

A number of Michigan workers, insisting on their right to petition their own elected officials, filed a lawsuit and won an injunction allowing them into the capitol building. The judge said state authorities must stop denying access to "the democratic process" and open the doors.

Union workers—including NALC members—and their supporters filled the capitol rotunda, chanting, "Shame on you!" and praising Democrats in the legislature for standing up against the power grab.

"This bill is a blatant attempt by the richest in Michigan to silence the voices of working families in our democracy, build their own power, and make the growing gap between the rich and everyone else even bigger," the Michigan AFL-CIO said.

Just hours after Snyder and the Republican leaders had made their plans public, the House and Senate Republican majorities steamrolled through the legislature right-to-work bills that would cover most private and public workers in the state. No hearings were held and there was almost no floor debate. The

bills would also limit the right to strike and picket. A few Republicans in both chambers joined Democrats in voting against the bills. The Senate passed two measures, one affecting private workers and one for public workers. After the first one passed, Senate Democrats walked out of the chamber in protest.

"Today was a dark day for democracy in Michigan," Michigan AFL-CIO President Karla Swift said. "The people were shut out of their own capitol so that lawmakers could better serve corporate special interests."

Visiting Michigan as the controversy raged, President Obama weighed in against the law.

"We should do everything we can to keep creating good middle-class jobs that help folks rebuild security for their families," Obama said in a speech at the Daimler Detroit Diesel plant. "What we shouldn't be doing is trying to take away your rights to bargain for better wages and working conditions. The so-called 'right-to-work' laws—they don't have to do with economics, they have everything to do with politics. What they're really talking about is giving you the right to work for less money."

After quick negotiations in the legislature over a final version, Snyder signed the bill into law Dec. 11 even as protestors shouted outside his door.

"It's unfortunate that some elected officials apparently didn't get the message from the latest election," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "Instead of backing working people like they promised, they snuck this through during a lame-duck session with no debate and no input from the people—aside from the protests, which they ignored."

"Gov. Snyder showed his true colors today: He's a puppet of extreme donors, and he is willing to ignore and lie to his constituents," AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said after Snyder signed the bill. "His action will undoubtedly please the Koch Brothers and corporate CEOs, but it will diminish the voice of every working man and woman in Michigan." **PR**



A labor protest in Lansing, MI, was held on Dec. 11.

Interest arbitration update

The interest arbitration board that will set the terms of a new National Agreement between NALC and USPS continues to meet and also to accept written testimony and exhibits from both sides.

The chairman of the three-person arbitration board is Shyam Das, a member of the American Arbitration Association's labor panel and a full-time labor arbitrator since 1977. The other members of the board are Bruce Simon, representing the NALC, and Robert Dufek for USPS.

The NALC anticipates that an award decision will be made sometime in January.

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