

8,500 demonstrate in Columbus, Ohio against anti-worker bill

By Brad Sykes
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A crowd of protesters estimated at around 8,500 by the Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board demonstrated at the Ohio Statehouse in Columbus against the anti-worker piece of legislation known as Senate Bill 5, which was expected to come before a Senate committee Tuesday, and may be voted on by the full Senate this week. Another demonstration against the bill is planned for today.

The bill, backed by Republican Governor John Kasich, would prohibit collective bargaining for 42,000 state workers in addition to 19,500 workers in the state's university and college system. It would reduce local government workers' ability to strike by allowing for their permanent replacement, it forbids automatic pay increases and sick day allowances for teachers and forces government workers to pay at least 20 percent of their own health care premiums.

The bill is now even more far-reaching in its attack on workers than when it was first proposed. An amendment introduced Tuesday by Sen. Shannon Jones would eliminate the right to strike for all public employees. Workers that violate this police state injunction would have their pay docked at a rate of twice their normal daily wage rate for each day of the strike. Those who violate court injunctions would face fines of up to \$1,000 and 30 days jail time.

Present at Tuesday's rally were students, nurses, teachers, and other protesters from around the state of Ohio. There was a heavy police presence, including a contingent of uniformed State Highway Patrol officers stationed inside the Statehouse to enforce strict limits on the number of people allowed to enter. A sign posted inside the capitol indicated that capacity was being limited to 640 "due to orders from the fire marshal." The building's actual capacity is closer to 5,000.

A student from Ohio State University who addressed the crowd invoked the struggles in Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia, stating that Ohio workers should follow their lead of "not being afraid to rise up for social change." This elicited one of the largest cheers at the rally. A worker delivering greetings to the crowd from the protesters in Wisconsin was also met with rapturous applause.

Despite the presence of several placards targeting the Ohio Republican Party leadership, one could sense that demonstrators were animated against broader attacks on living standards and democratic rights, which are in fact being pushed by both Democrats and Republicans—with the backing of the trade unions.

One protester at the rally said, "This isn't about Republican or Democrat, it's about an assault on the working class and our families. If we don't stand up now, who knows what the world will look like for my children?"

Union officials who addressed the demonstration did not offer any plan or perspective for how to defeat the bill beyond pressuring supposedly moderate Republican legislators. They focused their remarks on the defense of collective bargaining. There was vague discussion of the importance of showing solidarity with workers in Wisconsin, but they offered no proposals for linking up these struggles against the ruling class attack on wages and working class living standards that is being carried out across the country against public and private sector workers alike.

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