

## 10 Things You Need To Know About the Struggle for Workers' Rights in Indiana

Over the past two weeks there has been considerable national and local conversation about the legislative and popular protests struggles in Indiana, Wisconsin, Ohio and beyond. Much of this conversation has included misinformation or has not fully explained the complicated issues underlying the current struggle—and this is especially true of events unfolding in Indiana.

The following 10 Points will hopefully foster greater understanding of the struggle for worker's rights currently taking place right now in Indiana

1. *The Struggle in Indiana Was Inspired by Events in Wisconsin.* On February 21, thirty-four of the Democrat State Representatives left Indianapolis. They did this to prevent a vote from occurring on several Republican proposed bills that if passed would severely erode collective bargaining rights for unions and dramatically threaten the viability of the State's public school system. This move was inspired both by the extremism of the Republicans legislative agenda in Indiana, as well as by the lead of Wisconsin Democratic State Senators, who left their state on February 17<sup>th</sup>, to block similar legislation there.
2. *This is a struggle for Worker's Rights.* The most pressing issue that caused the Indiana Democratic Representatives to leave the State was a mounting legislative threat to workers rights. The Senate passed Bill 575, which would strip teachers of almost all of their bargaining rights, and the House was set to hear Bill 1468, known as the "Right to work" bill that would severely erode union's ability to collect dues from members and dramatically weaken their bargaining power.
3. *The "Right to Work Bill" Would Impact ALL Union Members in Indiana, Public and Private.* While much of the national media attention has framed this as a debate over the rights of public-sector unions, it is important to note that the proposed legislation in Indiana would impact both public and private sector unions in the state. This is not only a public workers issue, it is an issue for all working people in Indiana.
4. *Public Sector Union Rights Have Already Been Eroded in Indiana.* The bargaining rights of State employee unions used to be guaranteed by executive (governor's office) authority in Indiana. On his first day in office, seven years ago, Governor Mitch Daniels stripped State employees of their collective bargaining rights. The attack on working people in Indiana is not new, what is happening in the past few weeks is just the latest chapter of what is becoming a long, and increasingly alarming story.
5. *This Struggle is Not a Publicity Stunt, and Has Already Had a Positive Impact.* The Indiana Democratic Legislators tactic of leaving Illinois is a legitimate political tactic to block extremist policy changes. While this walk-out may be the first where legislators have had to cross Indiana state lines, it is not an unprecedented move. In fact, Indiana Republicans left the floor of the legislature in both 1991 and 2001 to block bills unpopular in their caucus. More importantly, the walk-out by Indiana representatives has already begun to show results. After the legislators left the state, Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels publicly expressed his opposition to the Right to Work Legislation.
6. *Tax Payers are NOT Paying the Hotel Bills of the Democratic Representatives Who Have Left Indiana.* Despite reports and rumors to the contrary, tax payers are not paying for the hotel bills of the Representatives who are staying in Illinois to block anti-worker and anti-public-education legislation. While these Representatives work to represent their constituents from outside of Indiana, the Indiana

Democratic Party is paying for the hotels, with the support of dozens of small individual donations from supporters of this effort.

7. *“Right to Work” Legislation Is Not the Only Threat to Workers Rights in Indiana.* Although there have been public statements that the “Right to Work” is off the table, other proposed legislation is still in play that would severely hurt worker’s rights in Indiana.
  - HB 1203 would end employee rights to join a union by secret ballot, making those who join unions potentially subject to employer retaliation. What is particularly troubling about this bill is that it flies in the face of federal law, and if passed would cost Hoosier tax payers money to defend this law in court.
  - HB 1585 would remove collective bargaining rights for public employees at the local level. This would duplicate the erosions of State workers rights for thousands of local government workers throughout Indiana.
  - House Bill 1538 would bar local governments in Indiana from setting a minimum wage higher than that of the state minimum wage, restricting local governmental autonomy and eliminating an important way for workers to organize for fair wages.
8. *The Struggle in Indiana is also about Protecting Public Education.* While battles over union worker’s rights have received the majority of the attention in the press, it is an important fact that the struggle in Indiana is also about protecting public education. Amongst the bills being considered, three proposed bills, if passed, would have a devastating impact on the funding and viability of K-12 public education in the State of Indiana:
  - Senate Bill 001 would allow outside agencies to evaluate teachers with no input from teachers into the evaluation tool and no recourse for appeal if teachers are fired unjustly.
  - HB 1003, known as the “school vouchers” bill would divert public money into private schools, and projections are that this would cost public schools to lose \$10 million. While being characterized by Republicans as a means to provide educational choice options for working and lower-middle class families, this legislation would effectively gut the public education funding system in Indiana.
  - HB 1479 would allow the state to take over poorly performing schools and turn them over to be managed by for-profit companies. It removes local decision-making in public schools, and when combined with HB 1003 would have a devastating impact on local, public school systems.
9. *The Struggle for Workers Rights and to Protect Higher Education has Broad National Support In Indiana.* A recent New York Times/CBS poll found a strong majority backs public service workers—60% “oppose weakening the bargaining rights of public employee unions.”
10. *The Struggle for Workers Rights will Impact a Significant Portion of the Indiana Workforce and Economy.* More than 300,000 or approximately 12% of the Indiana workforce are unionized labor. By threatening the long-term stability of this workforce, the proposed policies will not only hurt these workers, but hurt the Indiana working and middle class and the viability of the state’s economic future.