

Bush's campaign visit to Ohio

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On May 4, President Bush made a one-day campaign trip through Ohio, a Midwest industrial state that has suffered major job losses and is considered critical to the election chances of both the Democrats and Republicans. Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts, the presumptive Democratic nominee, has campaigned in Ohio six times within six months, including stops earlier this month in Youngstown, Cleveland and Toledo. Bush has campaigned in Ohio three times during the same period.

For Bush the trip was a welcome opportunity to escape from the scandal engulfing his administration over the abuse of prisoners in Iraq and to generate positive publicity. He began his campaign swing in the morning near Toledo with his usual assortment of lies and double-talk, appealing to workers to disregard the horrible social conditions they endure daily.

During the breakfast stop in Lucas County, Bush said, "I know there's a lot of people in this part of the state who are anxious." He then went on to say, "This economy is strong and it is getting stronger and the people of Ohio are going to feel the economic vitality that's occurring across the country." He also claimed his administration had a "vision to make sure prosperity reaches every corner of America." Those who have seen pensions reduced, wages cut, and health benefits diluted or eliminated are no doubt surprised to hear that their living conditions are getting better. Where is this prosperity and who is prosperous?

* Jobs

During Bush's term 223,700 jobs have been destroyed in Ohio. Roughly 35,000 workers in the state have exhausted their unemployment benefits, a 176 percent increase over the two previous years. Ohio ranks tenth in the country in gutting benefits to the unemployed.

The Temporary Emergency Unemployment Compensation Program, enacted in March 2002 to

ostensibly relieve those running out of benefits, has seen 52,000 exhaust benefits. The TEUC program is weaker than similar programs enacted in the recession of the early 1990s.

* Health Care

According to recent statistics from the Kaiser Family Foundation, Ohio has approximately 1.3 million people who are uninsured, of whom 300,000 are children. An additional 1.5 million are on Medicare. Due to recent federal Medicare legislation, there will be hefty increases in co-pays and prescription costs, and a reduction in the availability of services.

* Primary education

Ohio has roughly 17,000 public school students attending 68 charter schools. On the day of Bush's tour of the state, the *Dayton Daily News* announced that a middle school would be closing and 128 teachers and other support staff would lose their jobs. The Dayton school board said it faces a \$9 million deficit because of the siphoning off of state funds by charter schools. Ohio is, per capita, home to one of the largest percentages of charter schools in the US. Ohio's school funding has been declared unconstitutional by the Ohio Supreme Court on three occasions. The Ohio legislature has disregarded the findings and made no attempt to remedy the situation.

A coalition of Ohio education organizations filed suit in 2001. Among their findings were: state law violations, including failure of some charter schools to administer state proficiency tests, to file annual reports, to serve disabled students, and to hire certified teachers. The suit also alleges that some charter schools padded enrollments to inflate tax subsidies.

The lawsuit further charges that the charter school program is unconstitutional, violating the provision requiring the General Assembly to maintain a "thorough and efficient system of common schools." The suit alleges charter schools are not being held to

the same standards as the traditional schools and thus are not part of a system of common schools. Charter school legislation easily passed through both state houses with bipartisan support.

*** Higher education**

According the Washington State Higher Education Coordination board, Ohio's tuition is \$1,500 above the national average. While Ohio ranks 41st in funding, it ranks in the top 10 for most costly tuition in the country. Ohio funds about 45 percent of a student's tuition, while some other states like North Carolina fund 70 percent. Some universities like Miami of Ohio at Oxford have seen a 100 percent tuition increase in the last three years.

Ohio State University sophomores paid an additional 15.4 percent this fall and other major universities with the help of the Ohio Tuition Trust Authority were able to ram through double-digit tuition increases. The Trust Authority is supposed to set "reasonable" caps on higher education. Instead it has been instrumental in allowing unreasonable increases. With tuition ranging from \$5,300 to \$8,500 and room and board assign thousands of dollars in expenses, most universities cost well over \$10,000 per year, well out of the reach of most working and middle class families.

During Bush's tour of Ohio in his fortified cocoon, few details were given in the media regarding the current crisis in Iraq. However, there was one important incident that sheds light on the deep alienation of this administration from masses of working people. In Lebanon, Ohio, Bush's third scheduled stop of the day, a WWII veteran attempted to acquire a ticket to the afternoon event. When asked whether he would vote for Bush he indicated he would not vote for the president, and was denied a ticket.

The extraordinary security around the Bush visit further undercut his picture of a happy and prosperous America. When Bush, Karl Rove and their toadies arrived at Dayton International Airport, they were met, not by a cheering electorate, but by eight Republican local/regional officials, one of whom was the sheriff.

Before Bush could enter his speaking venue, numerous precautions had to be taken. Virtually all available police officers were mobilized, helicopters flew overhead, and a one-mile radius around the arena was cleared to ward off protesters. Large sections of I-75 (in some cases up to 10 miles in length), one of the

busiest highways in the country, were cordoned off. Snipers were conspicuously stationed on the roof. This is a man who is truly despised by millions.

No local, state, or national trade union even bothered to call for a protest against Bush during his visit. The AFL-CIO is unable and unwilling to mobilize workers because it knows all too well that its candidate Kerry, a promoter of more tax breaks for big business, will do nothing to address the ongoing destruction of jobs and stagnating and falling living standards.

A few days after Bush's visit, a team of SEP supporters spoke to hundreds of workers as they petitioned to place my name on the ballot in Ohio's 1st Congressional District, which covers the city of Cincinnati and Hamilton County. Workers overwhelmingly expressed anger at the actions and policies of the current administration. The issues of the war in Iraq, health care, affordable college education, a decent wage, the new Medicare legislation and police brutality were constant themes. The SEP calls on all workers to participate in this campaign and our other campaigns around the country.



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