

Oppose Michigan National Guard deployment against operating engineers!

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As the Socialist Equality Party candidate for US Congress in Michigan's 12th district, I condemn the moves by the administration of Governor Rick Snyder to use National Guard troops to replace locked out highway construction workers.

Some 2,000 heavy equipment operators, members of Operating Engineers Local 324, have been locked out by private construction companies organized by the Michigan Infrastructure and Transportation Association (MITA) since September 4 over a dispute, involving contracting out jobs and employer health care contributions. The lockout has halted construction on more than 100 highway projects in the state.

The intervention of the Snyder administration in the dispute is a blatant attack on democratic rights and must be opposed by all workers. It follows a long pattern of government strikebreaking operations, including the use by the Reagan administration of military personnel to replace striking PATCO air traffic controllers in 1981.

It should be recalled that in 1937 Michigan Governor Frank Murphy sent 4,000 National Guard troops to Flint to battle autoworkers occupying General Motors factories seeking union recognition. US military as well as National Guard troops were deployed in the midst of the 1967 urban rebellion in Detroit. Governor George W. Romney dispatched National Guard troops to Detroit again the following year, after the assassination of Martin Luther King.

The attack by the Snyder administration on operating engineers is in line with its policies directed against the working class, including its criminal indifference relating to the poisoning of Flint residents in the lead in water crisis and its overseeing the bankruptcy of Detroit and the robbing of retiree pensions.

In these attacks the Snyder administration has had the

full support of the Democratic Party. My opponent Debbie Dingell, a long-time lobbyist for General Motors and an heiress to the Fisher Body fortune, has not issued a statement on the threat to deploy National Guard troops in what amounts to blatant strikebreaking. This demonstrates once again that despite the claims by Democratic Party apologists that this party defends workers, on basic questions it stands on the side of the corporations.

At the same time, workers should have no illusions in the unions. Instead of mobilizing workers throughout Michigan and beyond to defend the operating engineers, Local 324 has isolated the workers, leaving them on their own in the face of the gang-up of the employers and the state. Local 324 kept workers on the job throughout the summer, even as the MITA withheld benefit payments, jeopardizing the healthcare and retirement of workers.

All indications are that the unions are preparing another climb down, agreeing to Snyder's proposal for a "cooling off" period, only to see the agreement scotched by the MITA. The union is now planning to meet with the governor even as he threatens to deploy the National Guard.

The working class cannot find support in aligning with either of the two big business parties. Workers must mobilize their own independent strength to oppose the strikebreaking by the Snyder administration and the employers. This should include preparations for a general strike against the use of National Guard troops. This can only be prepared by workers forming rank-and-file committees independent of the unions, to be the democratic voice and fighting organizations of workers. These committees must link up all construction trade workers and join their struggle with other sections of workers, including autoworkers,

teachers, Amazon workers and United Parcel Service workers in a common fight to defend jobs, safety conditions, healthcare and decent wages.



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