

# Anti-immigrant demagogue Lou Dobbs speaks in Detroit

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CNN anchorman Lou Dobbs spoke at a business breakfast November 29 at the Ritz Carlton Hotel in the Detroit suburb of Dearborn. The speech, entitled, “The Middle Class and the American Spirit,” is part of a series of speaking appearances throughout the US, to promote his new book *Independents Day: Awakening the American Spirit* and test the waters for a possible run as an independent candidate in the US presidential race.

Dobbs is a long-time admirer of right-wing economist Milton Friedman, who has described himself as a “lifelong Republican and a strong believer in free enterprise.” As the head of CNN’s financial news unit for nearly two decades he regularly presented fawning profiles of corporate CEOs and enjoyed the closest relations with Wall Street. In the last few years, however, the multimillionaire anchorman has reinvented himself as an “independent populist” who rails against the “business-political elite” and poses as a champion of the American worker.

Dobbs’s specialty is diverting social anger—produced by corporate downsizing, falling living standards and a two-party system dominated by big business and oblivious to the concerns of masses of working people—down the reactionary path of nationalism and anti-immigrant chauvinism.

His daily CNN show “Lou Dobbs Tonight” is a platform for nativism and xenophobia. During his segment on “Broken Borders,” Dobbs denounces the Bush administration and the Democrats for allowing the US to be overrun by “illegal aliens,” which he blames for everything from the loss of jobs and lower wages, to the overburdened public schools and health-care system, to terrorism, crime and disease. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center’s *Intelligence Report*, several of Dobbs’s past guests have been leaders of “hate groups,” which seek to incite violence against Mexican immigrants and have connections to white supremacist organizations such as the Council of Conservative Citizens. Of the Minuteman Project—a paramilitary group that is attempting to “seal” the Arizona border—Dobbs calls them a “terrific group of concerned, caring Americans.”

In front of the audience of mid-level automotive industry managers, local reporters and local politicians at the Dearborn meeting November 29, Dobbs refrained from his anti-Mexican and anti-immigrant rants. He began his remarks, however, by denouncing immigrant rights advocates who had gathered outside the hotel to protest his appearance, claiming they wanted to stifle free speech, while he only wanted to “create a dialogue” about issues the two political parties and the media were unwilling to

address.

Dobbs pitched his remarks towards the widespread disgust—even in this establishment audience—with the Bush administration, the Democratic-controlled Congress and the political “malaise,” as he put it, in Washington.

Dobbs said the political system was dominated by corporate America and pointed to estimates that candidates for the 2008 presidential race would spend a total of \$2 billion. The Republicans and Democrats, he added, were “bought and paid for by corporate America,” while CEOs had “abdicated their leadership” and “civic and corporate responsibilities” to the American people in order to pursue ever-greater profits.

Dobbs presented this situation—not as the inevitable product of the capitalist system—but as the “betrayal” of American values and “national sovereignty” by the country’s corporate and political leaders.

Dobbs decried the advocates of “globalization,” such as *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, who claimed “free trade would be beneficial to the US” when, in reality, it had led to record trade deficits, the decline of American industries, such as Detroit’s automakers, and the outsourcing of millions of jobs. “Michigan,” Dobbs said, was a “metaphor for a country that can no longer clothe and feed itself” but was dependent on foreign imports and the injection of billions of Chinese dollars to pay for the national debt.

Dobbs does not urge workers to mount a struggle against the unrelenting attack by the global corporations on their jobs and living standards. Instead he explicitly seeks to turn US workers against their counterparts in other countries by insisting that American workers and US corporate bosses have the same “national interests.” He insisted, for example, that the destruction of jobs among technical workers in the US was not the product of vicious cost-cutting and profit-making but the importing of lower-paid software engineers from India, under the government’s temporary H1B visa program.

(In his book *Independents Day*, Dobbs argues that illegal immigrants are the reason why the wages of meatpacking workers have fallen from \$19 an hour in 1980 to current wages of \$9. In fact, the destruction of wages and working conditions in the industry was the result of the corporate-government union-busting drive of the 1980s and smashed strikes at Hormel, Cudahy, Iowa Beef and other companies. The influx of Latin and Asian immigrants in the industry chiefly followed the decimation of

meatpacking workers' wages.)

Dobbs warned that the US was falling behind its economic competitors in industrial output, public infrastructure, educational standards, just as the growth of the world's population, he said, was leading nations to "compete for ever scarcer resources." Like every other politician or union bureaucrat who peddles this snake oil, Dobbs insists it is workers who must suffer the greatest deprivations to "save" the country.

He made this clear in his comments about the Iraq war. "Why is it that none of the Democratic or Republican candidates for president are standing before the American people and saying, 'Yes, Iraq, Afghanistan and the war on terror will have to be prosecuted—and we'll have to win—and I want you to know that it shouldn't just be the military but our whole nation at war.... the American people should be sharing equally in the sacrifices that our young men and women are making in the military.'"

In other words, the full cost of these criminal wars must be borne by working people through ever-greater cuts in social programs and living standards. Moreover, this sacrifice no doubt would also include a national draft to provide even more cannon fodder for US wars aimed at dominating the oil-rich Middle East and Central Asia.

Dobbs blamed much of the national debt on "uncontrollable consumer spending" and "extravagant programs" like Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. He complained that only two candidates—Republican Fred Thompson and Democrat Barack Obama—had "stepped forward" on Social Security and called for a reduction in benefits and extending the retirement age. Both proposals, Dobbs said, were necessary but they were woefully inadequate and expressed the reluctance of Washington to deal with these "unsustainable" and "unfunded" obligations.

In response to a question from the audience about his intentions in the 2008 president elections, Dobbs told the audience he was not considering running, but added that he would consider himself a "great candidate of last resort." He then predicted, "We will see an independent candidate for president in the next 90 days, like Ross Perot, who will push back against both political parties."

The Reform Party has reportedly approached Dobbs to run as its presidential candidate in 2008. This would be in line with the right-wing nationalist politics of this group, founded by Perot when the Texas billionaire made the second of his two presidential campaigns, running in 1996 on a platform denouncing the free trade agreement with Mexico and calling for slashing the national debt. In 2000, former Nixon speechwriter Patrick Buchanan was the Reform candidate, running on an anti-Chinese and anti-immigrant platform. In 2004, the Reform Party endorsed the independent campaign of Ralph Nader, another nationalist opponent of "globalization."

Dobbs's virulent nationalism has won him the support of sections of his fellow chauvinists in the American trade union bureaucracy. The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers union has presented the immigrant-baiting anchorman with the George J. Kourpias Excellence in Journalism Award.

During the question and answer period at the Detroit area event, Joe Kanan, a staff organizer for the Michigan Regional Council of

Carpenters, complained about the influence of lobbying firms from "foreign countries like China" on Michigan politicians. "Why not ask all the presidential candidates if they receive money from foreign lobbyists," he said, and his comments were met with approval from Dobbs.

For his part, Dobbs praised the United Auto Workers union—which recently agreed to slash the wages of new workers at GM, Ford and Chrysler by half—as "doing the best they can" given trade imbalances with Japan and other countries. While criticizing the AFL-CIO for trying to sign up "illegal aliens," he said organized labor had an important role to play as a "partner with business." For its part, Dobbs said, US businesses must understand the "unions are not the enemy."

One thing must be said about Dobbs. He is not a fool. He understands that the growing social tensions in the US are leading to an inevitable social explosion that could coalesce into a challenge to the entire economic and political system.

After his speech this reporter was among several others who questioned Dobbs. The following exchange took place:

WSWS: What would you say if someone compared your politics to LePen in France, who seeks to divert social tensions away from the social inequality and concentration of wealth in the hands of the rich by scapegoating immigrants and workers in other countries, and blaming them for unemployment and falling wages?

Dobbs: Anyone who would ask that question first of all doesn't have any understanding of LePen, who is a political figure. I am, in fact, an advocacy journalist. Secondly, you raise the question as if you are some sort of radical left-wing ideologue. I am not interested in your ideology; I'm not interested in the ideology of the right; this is a time for the American people and we have to take extremists in terms of your position on the political spectrum and push back against you.

This response is noteworthy. First of all, Dobbs did not take offense with the suggestion that his politics are comparable to the fascist LePen, whom he describes benignly as a "political figure." Most importantly, his virulence against "radical left-wing politics" suggests that Dobbs recognizes his most dangerous enemies are those who expose his efforts to defraud the working class and counterpose to nationalism a perspective of the international unity of the working class against the global capitalist system.



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