

The AFL-CIO's endorsement of Obama: A conspiracy against the working class

Statement by Jerry White, SEP candidate for US president

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With its endorsement of President Barack Obama's reelection campaign last week, the AFL-CIO union federation threw its support behind one of the most anti-working class and right-wing presidents in US history.

In his statement endorsing Obama, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka said the president "has earned the support of working people for a second term." To justify this, Trumka turned reality on its head, presenting the president's policies in the first term, including health care reform and the auto bailout, as pro-worker.

The AFL-CIO leader knows full well that health care reform is intended to allow corporate America to slash benefits and dump employer-paid medical coverage altogether. He is also aware that Obama plans, if reelected, to join the Republicans in slashing trillions from Medicare, Medicaid and other entitlements.

Nor are the leaders of the AFL-CIO, including the United Auto Workers, unaware that the White House used the auto bailout to push through an historic attack on the jobs and living standards of auto workers—including a 50 percent pay cut for new workers. This set the stage for a campaign of wage-cutting and speedup throughout private industry and the public sector, which continues to this day.

As a result, the auto companies and other corporations have raked in record profits, the stock markets have rebounded and CEOs and Wall Street investors are once again pocketing massive bonuses.

What then accounts for the brazen lying?

Trumka and the other leaders of the so-called American labor movement do not speak for the working class. On the contrary, the upper-middle class

business executives who control the unions, by virtue of their decades of anti-communist and American nationalist policies, have fully integrated themselves into the structure of corporate America and the capitalist state.

Their difference with the Republicans has nothing to do with the attacks on the working class. When given the opportunity, the unions have fully collaborated with the Republicans. However, for ideological reasons the Republicans tend to reject the services of the union apparatus and have instead sought to undermine the unions financially and politically.

Thus, the AFL-CIO has a huge stake in the reelection of Obama because, as Trumka says, the president "honors the value" of "solving problems together." In other words, the Democrats prefer to use the trade union apparatus to police the working class, impose wage cuts and suppress opposition. That is exactly what the White House did during the auto bailout. In return for its collaboration in the attack on auto workers, the White House handed the UAW a substantial ownership stake in GM and Chrysler.

The high-paid union executives are not opposed to wage-cutting. On the contrary, they see closing the wage gap between American workers and their brutally exploited counterparts in Mexico and China as a critical means of attracting corporate investment and bolstering the unions' faltering dues income.

The same is true for the American Federation of Teachers, which has offered its services to the administration even as Obama scapegoats and victimizes teachers, having adopted the Republican policies of merit pay, test-based accountability and privatizing public education. Appropriately, the slogan of the AFT is "school reform with us, not against us."

In their income and social status, those who make up the union apparatus are part of the wealthiest 5 to 10 percent of the population. This segment has enriched itself along with the explosive growth of wealth in the top 1 percent. While a typical union member earned \$48,000 in 2008, one analyst noted, the number of union officials earning more than \$150,000 tripled between 2000 and 2008.

Gerald McEntee, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), took home \$479,328 in salary and benefits in 2009. The American Federation of Teachers paid President Randi Weingarten \$428,384 in salary and benefits.

After decades of betrayed strikes and the unions' collaboration in corporate downsizing, the membership of the unions has fallen drastically. Workers increasingly look with contempt at these organizations.

Even the AFL-CIO officials, lounging at their winter getaway in Florida, expressed fears that their endorsement of Obama would fall on deaf ears. Polls by the organization show a sharp drop in support for Obama among working class voters as compared to the months before the 2008 election.

Between the working class and the leaders of the so-called American labor movement there is an unbridgeable gap of social and class interests. Workers have every interest in waging a struggle against the corporations and the government, while the unions defend the economic and political system—capitalism—that benefits only the corporate and financial elite.

The AFL-CIO and all the liberal and pseudo-left organizations, which promote the myth that the unions represent workers, are engaged in a conspiracy to tie workers to the Democratic Party. They want to block the development of an independent political struggle of the working class that threatens the profit system, which they defend.

My running mate Phyllis Scherrer and I are running in these elections to provide the working class with a socialist alternative to both big business parties. As part of our campaign we call on workers to break with the corporatist unions and build new organizations of struggle, controlled by the rank and file, to fight the attack on jobs and living standards.

Above all, we are fighting for the working class to break with the Democrats and Republicans and the entire structure of capitalist politics. Our campaign is aimed at the development of a mass political movement of the working class, which will fight for the unity of American workers with our brothers and sisters internationally and the socialist reorganization of economic and political life.

Only in this way can workers defend their social rights to decent jobs, health care, housing and education and replace the profit system with social equality and the democratic control of the economy by the working class.



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