

Union sellouts promote Democratic wage-cutters

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Monday's official Labor Day events highlighted the anti-working class lineup of the trade unions and the Democratic Party in the United States. In the face of mounting working-class anger and disgust with both big-business parties, the professional sellouts who run what is called the labor movement did their best to promote the myth that the Democrats speak for the working man.

Labor Day events called by the AFL-CIO and other unions in Boston, Pittsburgh and Detroit attracted few workers. In New York City, the labor federation has not even bothered to hold an event for years.

The disaffection of workers with these organizations stood in sharp contrast to the praise heaped on them by President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden. In Boston, Obama spoke before a rally of 700 people, overwhelmingly union bureaucrats and Democratic Party officials, before inviting American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten and Service Employees International Union President Mary Kay Henry to fly back to Washington, DC with him on Air Force One.

In Pittsburgh, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka and United Steelworkers President Leo Gerard hosted Vice President Joe Biden, who is considering a run for the Democratic presidential nomination against Hillary Clinton, whose campaign shows signs of foundering.

Obama and Biden both decried worsening conditions for the "middle class" and record levels of social inequality, evidently hoping that no one would notice that they have been in power for the past six-and-a-half years.

With a straight face, Obama declared that he had "walked the walk" when it came to protecting "the middle class." He denounced the Republicans for waging a "constant attack on working Americans" and expecting that "prosperity will come raining down on us from the top of whatever high-rise in New York City."

In Pittsburgh, Vice President Biden did his "ordinary Joe" routine. "I am mad, I am angry" about the way

workers have been "clobbered" in recent years, he shouted. Pointing to rising worker productivity alongside declining wages, he put on his "candid" face and said, "Here's the deal, folks: It's set up that way."

Do these corporate-controlled politicians really think the American people are that stupid?

Biden pretends that he and the administration for which he speaks are not part of the "set-up." In fact, the Obama administration has proven to be a ruthless enforcer of the demands of the corporate/financial elite.

Obama expanded the Wall Street bailout, handing trillions of dollars to the criminals who wrecked the economy. He then utilized the financial meltdown to restructure the auto industry on the basis of brutal pay cuts, setting a precedent for the transformation of the US into a low-wage economy.

In the midst of the deepest slump since the Great Depression, the administration starved state and city governments of resources, leading to the destruction of hundreds of thousands of education and public-sector jobs and the gutting of workers' pensions. Obama's Affordable Care Act set in motion the dismantling of employer-paid health insurance and massive cuts in the Medicare insurance system for the elderly.

At the same time, Obama oversaw a record rise in stock prices, corporate profits and CEO pay on the basis of virtually free cash for the financial elite, compliments of the Federal Reserve Board.

In introducing Biden in Pittsburgh, USW President Gerard praised him as the force behind a job-creation boom under Obama. "Joe Biden has been in the room, he has been the voice of working people in that room," Gerard declared.

What job creation? A Labor Day 2015 report by the National Employment Law Project noted the "historically low employment rate of prime-age workers and the stubbornly high number of individuals unemployed for

longer than six months.” The real unemployment rate—which includes those working part-time who want full-time work and those who have stopped searching but would take a job if one were available—remains at more than 10 percent.

The new jobs that have been created—largely part-time and in low-paying service industries—have replaced better-paid jobs wiped out by the corporations after the 2008 financial crash. Real median wages have fallen by four percent since the recession officially ended in mid-2009. The lowest-paid workers have suffered an average 5.7 percent decline in real wages.

The Economic Policy Institute reports that net productivity growth of 21.6 percent from 2000 to 2014 translated into a mere 1.8 percent rise in inflation-adjusted compensation for the median worker. In other words, eight percent of productivity growth went to labor, while 92 percent went to capital.

In the latest of a series of token “pro-labor” gestures, Obama signed an executive order Monday requiring federal contractors to provide up to seven days of paid sick leave a year. The order will apply only to new federal contracts starting in 2017. It will affect at most 300,000 workers, a miniscule fraction of the working class.

The unions and their “left” apologists are once again seeking to throttle working-class opposition by channeling it behind the Democratic Party, which has deservedly been called the graveyard of social protest.

These efforts include the Democratic presidential campaign of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, who has attracted a following with his denunciations of the “billionaire class” and condemnations of social inequality. The fact that Sanders, a longstanding ally of the Democratic Party, calls himself a socialist has made him all the more attractive to workers and youth looking for an alternative to the existing economic and political system.

But this supposed “socialist” has made it clear that the principal aim of his campaign is to restore credibility and revive flagging popular support for this anti-working class party of war and social reaction.

The substantive differences between the two parties of big business are marginal. One tactical difference is that the Republicans tend to oppose the unions while the Democrats prefer to use the services of the trade union bureaucracy to suppress the class struggle.

At the beginning of the year, there was speculation in the media about a wages push, with some 5 million workers coming up for contracts in 2015. There were

warnings that the mounting anger of workers, after the longest period of wage stagnation since the Great Depression, would fuel a revival of class struggle.

That no wages offensive has as yet emerged is due to the sabotage of the trade unions. Just last week, the United Steelworkers ordered 30,000 members at US Steel and ArcelorMittal to continue working without a contract, leaving 2,200 workers locked out at Allegheny Technologies to fight the company on their own.

There are hundreds of thousands of workers—at Verizon and AT&T, at the US Postal Service, in school districts in Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh and other cities—who have been blocked by the unions from taking action against further concession demands.

In a week’s time, contracts for 140,000 autoworkers at GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler are set to expire. Far from preparing a struggle, the United Auto Workers has pledged never to return to the days of “uncompetitive” labor agreements.

The UAW has offered to take over the provision of medical benefits for all Big Three autoworkers—active and retired, union and nonunion—in order to gain access to multibillion-dollar trust funds. In return for this new stream of revenue for the army of union bureaucrats, the union will take over the job of cutting health benefits for workers and agree to impose other concessions demanded by the companies.

The artificial suppression of the class struggle has its limits. Like workers in Greece, Germany and other European countries, and workers in Latin America, Asia and Africa, US workers are being thrust into a political confrontation with the capitalist system. This brings the workers into an ever more direct conflict with the corporatist arms, businesses in their own right, of the companies and the government—the unions.



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