

Trump peddles nationalist poison at Ohio rally

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15 March 2016

With polls showing a close contest between Donald Trump and Ohio Governor John Kasich in the state's primary for the Republican presidential nomination, Trump cancelled a planned event in Florida and scheduled a rally for the Youngstown area on Monday night. The stop in the economically depressed former steel center follows similar rallies in Cleveland and Dayton, two other Ohio cities ravaged by deindustrialization.

The far-right candidate is reportedly pursuing a "rust-belt" strategy aimed at exploiting the disaffection of sections of workers and lower-middle class people whose economic and social grievances have long been ignored by the Democratic Party and the trade unions. Posturing as a champion of workers and small businessmen, the billionaire insists he can "make America great again" by strengthening the military, building a wall to keep Mexican immigrants out and making trade deals that benefit the US, not China and Mexico.

In fact, Trump embodies the criminality of the ruling oligarchy in the United States, which has amassed vast fortunes precisely by impoverishing the working class and plundering society. In his remarks in Youngstown, he praised one of his closest supporters, billionaire asset stripper Carl Icahn, whose hostile takeovers of corporations like the airline TWA left tens of thousands of workers without jobs and pensions. Trump began his remarks by saying his first "job" was in Cincinnati, where he bought 1,164 rental units from the Federal Housing Authority. "I bought it for nothing and I sold it for a lot of money," he gloated.

Fearing the growth of militancy and anti-capitalist sentiment among workers and youth, sections of the ruling class are encouraging the development of a fascistic tendency based on virulent American nationalism and militarism and the suppression of all forms of popular opposition. In his Youngstown remarks, Trump slandered Muslim and Mexican immigrants as the "enemy within." He recited a poem about a kindly, naïve woman who had rescued and cared for an injured snake only to be fatally bitten by the sinister reptile.

The main thrust of his remarks was to blame mass unemployment and falling wages not on the ruthless operations of figures like Icahn and himself, but on "unfair trade agreements." American politicians like Governor Kasich had signed on to deals like the North American Free Trade

Agreement (NAFTA) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Trump asserted, either out of their stupidity or because they were being paid by China, Japan, Mexico or another foreign power.

In the Cleveland area, Trump said, auto parts maker Eaton was "going to Mexico" and "Ford was going to Mexico...We are losing jobs, income, factories are going to China, Mexico, Japan, Vietnam, India, to everybody." If he were elected president, Trump declared, he would call up the executives at air conditioner maker Carrier, Ford, Nabisco and other companies moving operations to Mexico and tell them they would face a 35 percent tax on everything they were shipping back to the US. "Within 24 hours, I will get a call saying, 'Mr. President, we have decided to stay in the US'... We are going to win again. Win at the border. Win at war."

Based on this demagoguery and his efforts to tap into deep social anger in communities ravaged by deindustrialization, Trump has been able to win a certain amount of support in cities such as Youngstown. This has been possible only due to the right-wing and anti-working class politics of the Democratic Party, aided and abetted by the trade unions.

Workers in Youngstown and similar cities have suffered from the decades-long policy of corporatism pursued by the United Steelworkers, the United Auto Workers and other trade unions, which have blocked any resistance to the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs. Through their alliance with the Democratic Party, the unions have worked to prevent workers from finding any political means through which to express their independent class interests. At the same time, the unions have long promoted economic nationalism, legitimizing the chauvinist poison now being spewed by Trump.

The history of Youngstown itself demonstrates that the only possible means of undermining such demagogues as Trump is by fighting for the unity of the working class—white, black and immigrant, in the United States and internationally—on the basis of a program that meets their common class interests.

In the early 20th century, the employers in the Steel Valley used nativism and anti-immigrant chauvinism to divide and weaken the working class. In 1924 Italian and Irish immigrants had to fight street battles with the Ku Klux Klan in neighboring Niles.

During the “Great Steel Strike of 1919,” Youngstown workers joined 350,000 steelworkers nationally in a struggle for higher wages, the eight-hour day and union recognition. Fearing the influence of socialism just two years after the Russian Revolution, the employers and the government once again used anti-immigrant chauvinism, along with federal troops, to violently put down the strike.

A year before, on June 16, 1918, the great American socialist Eugene Debs gave an anti-war speech in nearby Canton, Ohio. “I have no earthly use for the Junkers [military aristocracy] of Germany, and not one particle more use for the Junkers in the United States,” Debs declared. For his anti-war stance, Debs was jailed under the Espionage Act of 1917. In the presidential election of 1920, however, Debs won nearly 1 million votes while he remained in a prison cell.

During the “Little Steel Strike” of 1937, Youngstown was again a center of militant opposition by workers seeking to establish industrial unions. This time the employers, including Youngstown Sheet and Tube and Republic Steel, brought in African-Americans from the Deep South as strikebreakers and to foment racial divisions. Left-wing militants and socialist-minded workers fought to unite black, white and immigrant workers in the same union.

On June 19, 1937, just a month after the Chicago police killed or severely wounded 23 strikers at Republic Steel during the Memorial Day Massacre, a similar event took place in Youngstown when 300 cops protecting the Republic steel mill fired tear gas and shot directly into a crowd of strikers. The “Women’s Day Massacre” left two dead and dozens injured, while scores of prominent strike leaders were later arrested in home raids. The strike was broken, and the “Little Steel” companies were not unionized until 1942.

In 1966, General Motors opened the Lordstown Assembly Plant in nearby Warren. The factory became the center of rank-and-file opposition to the corporation and the UAW bureaucracy in the 1970s, with a wave of wildcat strikes against speed-ups and other deplorable work conditions in 1972-74. Many workers who migrated to the area had also passed through the militant struggles of coal miners in Kentucky, West Virginia and other Appalachian states.

By the mid-1970s, however, American capitalism was in the midst of a historic decline, and its industries faced growing international competition. The ruling class responded with a wave of plant shutdowns and mass layoffs while increasingly turning to financial speculation as its chief form of wealth accumulation.

The trade unions, which wholeheartedly embraced a nationalist and pro-capitalist program, had no answer to the globalization of production. They abandoned any resistance and, in the name of making the US corporations more competitive, embraced the corporatist program of labor-management “partnership,” suppressing any opposition to the class war policies of the corporations and both big business

parties.

This had devastating consequences in Youngstown. The takeover of Youngstown Sheet and Tube loaded the company up with debt, and on September 19, 1977 the company shut down a portion of its Campbell Works mill. This threw 5,000 workers out of their jobs in what is still referred to as “Black Monday.” Two years later, YST closed its Brier Hill plant. This was followed by the 1980 shutdown of US Steel’s 90-year-old Ohio Works and then the closing of its McDonald Works, bringing to over 9,000 the number of jobs lost in Mahoning Valley since 1977.

In the wake of these shutdowns, the Youngstown area lost an estimated 40,000 manufacturing jobs, 400 satellite businesses, \$414 million in personal income and between 33 and 75 percent of school tax revenues. According to the 2010 census, Youngstown had 66,982 residents, around 40 percent of its population in 1959.

The fundamental cause of the deindustrialization of Youngstown and countless other Rust Belt cities is not “unfair trade deals,” but capitalism. The nationalist policies of the unions served only to suppress the class struggle while driving a wedge between US workers and their class brothers and sisters internationally.

The attack on workers’ jobs in the US takes place amid a global breakdown of the world capitalist system, which is leading to the destruction of millions of jobs, including those of hundreds of thousands of steelworkers in China, and the resurgence of working class struggles around the world. In order to unify the working class, workers must reject all forms of nationalism—whether promoted by Trump, Democrat Bernie Sanders or the trade unions—and unify their struggles in a political fight to abolish capitalism, the source of poverty, inequality and war.



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