

UAW lines up behind Trump's call for trade war

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In a statement last Friday, United Auto Workers President Dennis Williams registered his support for the call by Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump for a 35 percent tariff on cars imported from Mexico to the United States.

Williams' remarks followed the September 26 presidential debate, where Trump attacked the previously announced plans by Ford Motor Co. to move production of its Focus and Ford C-Max models from the Michigan Assembly Plant in Wayne, Michigan to a new facility it is building in Mexico. The move by Ford follows a similar announcement by Fiat Chrysler earlier this year that it is ending passenger car production in the United States in order to concentrate on building more profitable light trucks and sports utility vehicles.

Trump's claim to defend the jobs of American workers is a fraud. He based his criticism of Ford on his reactionary program of American nationalism and anti-immigrant racism. His proposal for a huge tariff on vehicles imported from Mexico would encourage similar measures by other countries and hasten the descent into all-out trade war with incalculable economic consequences.

In the course of the presidential debate, the UAW rushed to the defense of its sellout agreement last year with Ford, tweeting in response to Trump's criticism, "Ford is not moving jobs out of Michigan. Our agreement secures future product commitments for affected plants." The fact is, that the 2015 Ford-UAW contract sanctioned the outsourcing of US small car production. While Ford has said it will build two new vehicles at the Michigan Assembly Plant, there is no guarantee that the new vehicles will be successful, especially with indications of an impending decline in auto sales.

Of far greater significance was Williams' defense of Trump's economic nationalism. The nationalist ravings of Trump dovetail with the UAW's corporatist program based on the subordination of the working class to the interests of the American auto companies. While the UAW has endorsed Hillary Clinton, the chosen candidate of Wall Street and the military intelligence apparatus, it shares many of Trump's extreme right-wing nationalist positions.

Both the UAW and Trump seek to channel the anger of American workers over the incessant attacks on jobs and living conditions against workers overseas. Not only is this demagogic and divisive, the promotion of trade war policies is bankrupt as a strategy for defending jobs. Such a program runs counter to the interests of autoworkers, portraying workers in Mexico, Canada, China, etc. as the enemy, not the auto bosses. It thus promotes a fratricidal race to the bottom, pitting workers around the globe in competition against each other, and lining them up for new and evermore catastrophic wars for the control over markets and raw materials.

The cause of job cuts is not global integration of the economy or unfair trade deals, but the capitalist profit system, which subordinates the needs of workers in every country to the profit drive of the corporate and financial elites. The promotion of economic nationalism—which has been used by the UAW for decades to cover up its collaboration with the auto bosses—has never saved a single job.

The rottenness of the UAW's nationalist program is underscored by ongoing developments in Canada, where the Unifor union recently imposed a sellout contract, over substantial opposition, onto the backs of autoworkers employed at General Motors. The deal continues the hated two-tier wage structure, while

providing a miniscule wage increase for senior workers, who have not seen a pay raise in 10 years. The deal presented by Unifor was not even a finalized contract, but merely a “framework” for an agreement, with details to be filled in later.

In order to sell this deal, Unifor and GM used economic blackmail, threatening to shift jobs out of the country, likely to the United States, if workers did not accept management’s offer. The sellout accepted by Unifor follows the pattern set by the 2015 UAW sellout in the United States, which resulted in massive cost savings for the auto companies, which are celebrating booming profits.

For its part, the UAW refused to state that it will not scab on Canadian workers in the event of a strike north of the border. Plants in the United States build many of the same products as GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler plants in Canada. Therefore, for a strike by Canadian autoworkers to be effective, American workers would have to refuse the transfer of work. This course of action is completely opposed to the program of the UAW, which is oriented to the defense of “American” jobs by offering up US autoworkers as a docile, low-wage workforce in order to attract capital investment.

The nationalist position of the UAW, like Unifor in Canada, cuts across the international unity of the working class that is required to fight the transnational auto companies. This was demonstrated in the 1985 split between the Canadian Auto Workers and the UAW. The split proved disastrous for workers on both sides of the border, with hundreds of thousands of jobs eliminated and workers’ living standards decimated.

Fiat Chrysler CEO Sergio Marchionne used the threat of shifting production to the United States to ram through historic cuts on Fiat workers in Italy in 2015. The deal eliminated any cost-of-living allowances and imposed performance-based pay that will mean a drastic worsening of the living standards of Italian Fiat Workers. Italian union leaders justified the sellout on the grounds that it would bring “jobs and investments” to the country.

American autoworkers must take a stand with their brother workers in Mexico, Canada and around the world in defense of all jobs, no matter on which side of the border. Against the attempt of the unions and the auto bosses to play workers off against each other, the working class must advance an international strategy

based on opposition to the capitalist profit system and for the public ownership of the auto plants under the democratic control of the working class.

Williams’ remarks again demonstrate that the UAW is an anti-working class organization. The unity of autoworkers around the globe is possible only based on the creation of new organizations of struggle. This requires that workers break with the nationalist unions and build new, democratic, rank-and-file-based organizations independent from the parties of big business and the corporations.



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