

US unions praise Trump and his “America-First” nationalism

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It did not take long for the executives that run the US trade unions to offer their loyal services to President-elect Donald Trump. While millions of workers and young people are disgusted and angered over the election of the ultra-right billionaire, the AFL-CIO and the United Auto Workers (UAW) issued statements Thursday cozying up to Trump and praising his economic nationalism and protectionist trade policies.

On Thursday, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka issued a groveling statement, saying, “The President-elect made promises in this campaign—on trade, on restoring manufacturing, on reviving our communities. We will work to make many of those promises a reality. If he is willing to work with us, consistent with our values, we are ready to work with him.”

In comments to reporters Thursday, UAW President Dennis Williams echoed these remarks, adding that he wanted to meet with Trump as soon as possible to discuss trade issues. Williams said he saw “a great opportunity” to “find some common ground” with Trump, including the imposition of a 35 percent tariff on automakers that import vehicles from Mexico.

“We agree NAFTA either needs to be renegotiated or ended,” Williams said, referring to the North American Free Trade Agreement. “I’m prepared to sit down and talk to him about trade...I think his position on trade is right on.”

Dodging the question of why the UAW, which has long been a mainstay of the Democratic Party, would loyally work with a Republican president, Williams said, “When I see that, I don’t see the traditional Republican president. I see somebody who made a lot of commitment to workers about fairness and being part of the American dream, rebuilding the American middle class, creating opportunities. We’ll see what he does.”

The claim that Trump will do anything to benefit working people is a fraud. He is committed to a right-wing policy of corporate tax cuts, deregulation and slashing wages. Trump’s closest allies include billionaire asset stripper Wilbur Ross who destroyed the jobs and pensions of thousands of steelworkers, auto parts workers and coal miners, as he bought and “flipped” entire industries. Another is Carl Icahn, the corporate raider who did the same to airline workers and Trump’s casino workers, and left Trump’s post-election celebration to invest a billion dollars to buy up stocks as the market plunged, only to make a bundle as its shot back up.

These anti-working class policies, however, are entirely compatible with the role of the unions themselves in enforcing cuts on the workers they claim to represent.

The AFL-CIO and Change to Win labor federations and their affiliated unions spent a record \$150 million in their failed effort to elect Hillary Clinton, the favored candidate of Wall Street. Like the leaders of other Democratic Party aligned organizations, Trumka denounced Trump as a “fraud,” saying he would slash wages, cut corporate taxes and break the unions. But the impact of stagnant wages and deteriorating living standards, aided and abetted by the unions, led to the failure of the get-out-the-vote campaign for Hillary Clinton.

The unions’ endorsement of Clinton was in line with their longtime political alliance with the Democratic Party, which over the past eight years under Obama has spearheaded the attack on autoworkers and the working class as a whole. The Obama administration’s restructuring of the auto industry in 2009 was based on forcing workers to accept major cuts in wages and benefits, along with the destruction of tens of thousands

of jobs.

While the Democratic vote declined sharply since 2012—among black, white and immigrant workers—a section of industrial workers in the former Democratic strongholds of Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Iowa voted for Trump, who postured as an anti-establishment candidate.

The unions have worked with the Democrats because the Democrats have generally favored using the unions to police the working class, in the process ensuring that union executives receive a portion of the proceeds. However, with the election of Trump, these same executives are seeking to guarantee their interests under a future Republican administration.

At the same time, there is a natural affinity for the proto-fascist Trump within the union apparatus, which has long spewed the poison of economic nationalism and anti-Asian and anti-Mexican chauvinism. Thoroughly hostile to class-consciousness and socialism, and proponents of the corporatist outlook of “labor-management-government” cooperation for the “national interest,” the union bureaucracy is a breeding ground for a future fascistic movement.

This has objective roots that go beyond the corruption of this or that union bureaucrat. In the 1980s, the UAW and other unions—which like unions around the world are based on a nationalist and pro-capitalist program—had no progressive answer to the globalization of production and historic decline in the position of American industry. Instead, they isolated strikes, collaborated with the bosses to slash jobs and wages, and fully integrated themselves into the structure of corporate management.

At its 1983 constitutional convention, which sanctioned the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs, the UAW bureaucracy officially adopted the doctrine of corporatism, which rejects the fact that workers have interests apart from and hostile to those of the capitalist owners. In an analysis of this move, the Workers League, the forerunner of the Socialist Equality Party, pointed out that the UAW’s proposals for the adoption of a “national industrial policy” and the integration of labor and capital into bodies recognized by the state were virtually identical to the program carried out by Italian fascism under Mussolini.

To undermine class consciousness among militant workers, the UAW and other unions relentlessly

promoted the lie that it was foreign workers, not capitalism, that were responsible for the destruction of jobs. The only answer, therefore, was to sacrifice all the gains won by workers over generations of struggle to make US companies more “competitive,” i.e., profitable. So vicious was the anti-Japanese racism of the UAW in the 1980s and 1990s that it led to the murder of 27-year-old Vincent Chin, a Chinese American raised in Detroit, who was beaten to death by a Chrysler foreman and his laid-off son.

The unions’ support for Trump’s plans to build a Fortress America would only trigger trade war policies by America’s economic rivals, ushering in a collapse of the US and world economy and inevitably leading to world war, similar to the 1930s and 1940s.

The union executives are also offering Trump their services as a labor police force in exchange for getting a prominent role in future infrastructure projects and national plans to coerce more output from workers for war. Williams stressed that the UAW supports Trump’s plan for an infrastructure program and said he would urge the President-elect to establish industrial apprentice training programs similar to those in Germany.

A Trump administration will be dominated by crisis, both internal and external, and incapable of resolving the entrenched problems of American capitalism. It will also confront mass social opposition from the working class. Millions will quickly come to realize the billionaire charlatan has no ability, let alone intention, to improve the conditions of anyone except his own ruling class.

The embrace of Trump will only further discredit the UAW and other unions, which are increasingly facing rank-and-file opposition to their pro-corporate policies. In the fight against the ruling class and in defense of jobs, wages and basic social rights, the working class confronts in the unions a bitter enemy.



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