

“Workers are going to see Trump is not going to do anything for them”

Autoworkers react to the election of Trump

Shannon Jones
17 November 2016

In the wake of the election of billionaire real estate tycoon Donald Trump to the US presidency executives who run the United Auto Workers (UAW) and AFL-CIO have rushed to embrace the fascistic demagogue. In statements issued shortly after the election UAW President Dennis Williams and AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka pledged to cooperate with the new administration on the basis of economic nationalism and “America-first” chauvinism.

Autoworkers contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site* expressed disgust with the groveling of the UAW before Trump. At the same time many acknowledged that the large vote for Trump in many working class areas reflected the fact that he was able to tap into the deep social anger of workers over declining living standards, a product of decades of betrayals by the UAW and the abandonment by the Democratic Party of any vestiges of liberal social reform.

UAW President Williams himself admitted that better than 30 percent of UAW members had voted for Trump. The Republican candidate was able win in a number of industrial states including Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, where workers’ living standards have been ravaged by plant closings and layoffs, abetted by the unions.

Obama’s 2009 restructuring of the auto industry, conducted with the collusion of the UAW, led to dozens of plant closings and tens of thousands of layoffs, which hit the states won by Trump particularly hard. A partial list includes: GM assembly plants in Janesville, Wisconsin and Pontiac, Michigan; the Grand Rapids Metal Center in Michigan and Chrysler assembly plant in Wilmington, Delaware plant in 2009; GM’s Indianapolis Metal Center, Willow Run

assembly and Saginaw Steering plants in Michigan; Ford’s Cleveland Casting and Chrysler’s Detroit Axle, Kenosha, Wisconsin engine plant; and Twinsburg, Ohio stamping plants in 2010 and two Chrysler assembly plants in Fenton, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis in 2011.

A worker at the Ford Chicago Assembly Plant told the WSWWS he was not surprised by the UAW’s reaction to Trump’s victory. “What do you expect from a union that is nothing more than a secretary for the corporations? Whatever the companies want, that is what the UAW will do. For us the workers, they have done nothing.”

A worker at the Jefferson North Assembly Plant in Detroit commented, “I am not surprised as far as the UAW goes. Everything they do is for themselves, not the workers. No one is surprised by it.”

Many workers rejected the claim that the vote for Trump reflected a resurgence of racism as claimed by various liberal and “left” apologists for Clinton, Obama and the Democrats. Instead they said the vote reflected deep social anger and disgust with the establishment politicians. The Ford worker said, “They say it is ‘whitelash.’ That is B.S. They forgot about the working class and the working class has been beat up so bad that they don’t know what to do.

“They try to make it a race issue, but the working class has really been hit hard. This has gone on for decades. It doesn’t matter who is in office, the working class pays for everything. All of these bailouts they did have been on the backs of the working class. They bailed out the auto industry, but they didn’t do anything to help the people of Detroit.

“The Democrats are so out of touch. In their speeches

they talk about the ‘middle class,’ not the working class. We haven’t been middle class for decades. We live with insecurity month after month, year after year.”

A number of workers expressed anger over the endless wars carried out by the United States under the mantle of the phony “war on terror.” The Chicago Ford worker said, “We are tired of all these wars. We are tired of sending kids, friends, nephews off to these wars and having them come back all screwed up. Then they have to live off charity when they come back, when the government should be supporting them.”

Many autoworkers are expressing concern over the incoming Trump administration’s policies, which will be directed against the democratic rights of the working class. As the WSWS has noted, the ability of Trump to attract the vote of workers on the basis of his program of economic nationalism and anti-immigrant chauvinism was aided by anti-foreigner, “Buy American” agitation of the UAW, which has sought to divert workers’ anger over plant closures and declining living standards against workers in other countries.

The Jefferson North worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “There is anger and disbelief that Trump won the election, with him being a racist.

“Surprisingly large numbers of UAW members voted for Trump,” she said. “He gave the people the belief that they had a voice. A lot of other people didn’t vote because they didn’t like either Clinton or Trump.

“He shouldn’t have gotten as far as he did. I don’t think he expected to go that far.”

During the primaries Bernie Sanders had won wide support from autoworkers, including in Michigan where he won an upset victory over Clinton. Sanders’ embrace of Clinton allowed Trump to monopolize social discontent and channel it in a thoroughly reactionary direction.

This reporter explained that the lack of enthusiasm for Clinton was not due to racism or sexism but over her record as a crony of Wall Street and a promoter of militarism and war. There was broad hostility in the working class to both candidates reflecting a growing alienation on the part of workers to the whole political establishment.

An autoworker with 18 years seniority at Ford’s flagship Rouge plant in Dearborn, Michigan explained his decision not to vote as based on something quite different from political indifference. The Obama

restructuring of the auto industry in 2009 cut wages for new hires in

half and decimated their health care as well as benefits for retirees. Voicing a growing hostility to both big business parties, “I could not support either one of them,” he said with disgust. “None of them are any good.”

A worker at the Fiat Chrysler Jeep Complex in Toledo, who previously supported Sanders, said, “I think 40 percent of UAW members voted Republican. Many saw it as something new and fresh. The company is always using the threat they will shift production to Mexico against us.”

I noted that Trump and the UAW shared a reactionary nationalist agenda, aimed at scapegoating workers in Mexico, China and internationally for the attacks on workers’ living standards imposed by the capitalist profit system. This is aimed at dividing American workers from their class brothers globally by pitting them in a fratricidal struggle over a dwindling number of jobs.

The election of Trump, I stressed, underscored the urgent necessity of workers breaking politically with both big business parties and building an independent political party of the working class to fight for a socialist alternative to the capitalist profit system.

The Chicago Ford worker agreed. “The majority here did not vote. They didn’t see any difference. It is not a democracy.

“Yeah it will be bad with Trump, but in reality it would be the same with Clinton. You have the good cop and the bad cop, but in the end it is the same thing.

“Workers are going to see that Trump is not going to do anything good for the working class, then they are going to start seriously looking at branching out from the two parties.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact