

Trump, Republicans spout nationalism and reaction at Wisconsin rally

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Donald Trump's "Thank You Tour" continued in the Milwaukee suburb of West Allis, Wisconsin Tuesday evening. On stage with the president-elect were a collection of co-reactionaries, including Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus, Speaker of the House and US Congressman from Wisconsin Paul Ryan and the state's hated governor Scott Walker.

Each delivered remarks presenting Trump's victory as the result of a popular groundswell for the Wisconsin Republicans over the last decade. On the face of it this claim strained credulity given that Trump repeatedly denounced Ryan and the "Republican establishment" during the campaign.

Priebus declared there must be "something in the water" in southeastern Wisconsin where Walker, Ryan, and Priebus all hail from. In reality, "what's in the water" was the social anger generated by decades of deindustrialization, declining living standards and attacks by both parties on public education, welfare and other vital programs, along with the slashing of jobs and wages by corporations. The disdain for the working class expressed by Hillary Clinton and Obama allowed the billionaire Trump to posture as an anti-establishment candidate and monopolize social discontent.

Trump began by praising Milwaukee Sheriff David Clarke, an African American Democrat, who called for a state of emergency and the use of "all non-lethal force" to "quell" the anti-Trump protests that erupted across the country after the elections. Earlier this month it was revealed that Clarke threatened the Milwaukee County Chief Medical Examiner after he released information about two inmates who died from neglect in the county jail.

Trump added his own authoritarian and anti-democratic sentiments, saying he would consider

"taking a look at" the Supreme Court ruling protecting flag burning as a constitutional expression of free speech. He went on to praise his cabinet picks—a collection of billionaires, generals and ultra-reactionaries who plan to destroy the educational, health, housing, and environmental services and regulations that they have been appointed to oversee.

He took the occasion to announce his nominee for secretary of state, Exxon-Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson, who he described as the "greatest global businessman" and a man who makes the "best deals in the oil industry." In fact, the appointment of the chief executive of one of the world's largest oil monopolies to head US foreign policy only underscores that Trump's administration will be a government of the plutocracy.

This did not stop Trump from posing as a champion of working class. "Jobs, jobs, jobs," would be the guiding principle of his administration, Trump claimed. This translates to massive corporate tax cuts and the lifting of any restraints on corporate profit making, including occupational health and safety, environment and labor standards regulations.

In reality, the state has already employed such methods, along with concession after concession granted to big business by the trade unions. Local manufacturer MasterLock "brought back" a handful of jobs from Mexico and China for vastly lower pay and next to no benefits. The United Auto Workers and the Obama administration hailed this as a success of their "in-sourcing" strategy.

Trump coupled his empty promise to fight for the interests of American workers with chauvinism and xenophobia against immigrants, reiterating his intentions to build a wall along the US border with Mexico and "protect" American jobs on the basis of

economic nationalism. The spewing of this nationalist poison, long the stock-in-trade of the unions, is aimed at concealing the fact that it is capitalism and the ruthless pursuit of profit by Trump's own class that is responsible for plant closings and wage cuts, not workers in China or Mexico.

Far from defending jobs, protectionist measures will only spark trade war with US competitors, a collapse of the world economy and the descent into world war. Trump's remarks on foreign and military policy were more revealing. Well aware of popular sentiment against war, Trump criticized the wars launched by Bush and Obama, calling them "blunders and disasters" and pointing to their financial and human costs. His "new direction" for foreign policy, however, involves a massive increase in military spending to modernize and build-up "our badly depleted military" and a sharp escalation of military violence aimed at "destroying ISIS."

The Democratic Party effectively handed Trump electoral victories in Wisconsin and other so-called Rust Belt states by ignoring the conditions faced by workers devastated by the loss of industrial jobs, the fall in real wages, the loss of pensions and a sharp rise in health care costs under the Obama administration. Clinton promoted racial and gender politics and expressed nothing but contempt for supposedly "privileged" white working-class voters. Bernie Sanders also played a key role in facilitating Trump's victory. After winning the Wisconsin Democratic primary and 13 million votes nationally by appealing to the hostility of workers towards "the billionaire class," he turned around and delivered his support to the favored candidate of Wall Street and the CIA, Hillary Clinton.

The claim that Scott Walker and state Republicans are popularly supported is belied by the mass demonstrations that rocked Wisconsin in 2011 after Walker sought to impose sweeping attacks on public sector workers and state services. For weeks, hundreds of thousands of workers and youth from Wisconsin and around the country demonstrated against Walker's measures in Madison, the state capital, and supported the occupation of the capitol building. The protests generated international support including from workers and young people involved in the Egyptian Revolution.

Walker only survived because the American

Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) and other unions collaborated with the Democrats to crush the protests, fearing they would spread to nearby states where Democratic governors were imposing similar austerity measures and coalesce into a political confrontation with the Obama administration. Working with the Democrats, the unions shut down the protests and diverted them into a campaign to recall Walker and hold new elections. The Democrats then ran the pro-business Milwaukee mayor Tom Barrett who was predictably defeated.

The UAW and other unions paved the way for Trump by promoting economic nationalism for decades, blaming Mexican and Chinese workers for "stealing American jobs" while collaborating in the shut-down of scores of Wisconsin plants, including the Janesville General Motors plant, closed as part of Obama's UAW-backed restructuring of General Motors in 2009.

The myth of a wellspring of support for Trump is refuted by the election results. Trump won the vote by less than 23,000 of the 2,787,820 ballots that were cast in the state. He received roughly the same number as Mitt Romney did in 2012 when the Republican lost the state to Obama. The story of Trump's victory was the sharp fall of votes for Clinton, who received 200,000 fewer votes than Obama in 2012 and 300,000 fewer than he received in 2008.

After eight years of Obama, the Democrats lost the votes not only of white working-class voters in industrial and rural areas of the state, but minority voters in Milwaukee who did not come out in the numbers that the Clinton camp expected. The election of Trump was not an expression of enthusiastic popular support for his candidacy, but political disgust with Clinton and the Democratic Party.



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