

As Trump promotes America First nationalism at South Carolina Boeing plant

UAW to launch “Buy American” campaign

Shannon Jones
18 February 2017

United Auto Workers President Dennis Williams said Thursday that the union would intensify its reactionary “Buy American” campaign. At the same time, the UAW chief praised President Donald Trump for his call to renegotiate the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

The announcement by Williams underscores the full solidarity of the UAW with the right-wing nationalist demagoguery of the Trump administration. The day after Williams announced the Buy American campaign, President Trump declared in a speech to workers at the Boeing factory in North Charleston, South Carolina that his mantra was, “Buy American. Hire American.”

The occasion for Trump’s speech was the launch of Boeing’s newest aircraft, the Dreamliner 787-10. Significantly, the president did not mention the crushing defeat the International Association of Machinists suffered earlier in the week in a union recognition vote at the North Charleston facility. In a bow to the steelworkers union bureaucracy, Trump restated his order calling for use of American steel in the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. He concluded his remarks declaring, “God Bless America and God Bless Boeing!”

In his announcement, Williams indicated that the union aims to develop a television advertising campaign to promote the purchase of American made products and is developing a list to make it easier for consumers to identify US-built vehicles. He added, “We’re seeing a trend – the boycott may be coming” back, referring to non-US manufactured vehicles.

The revival of the Buy American campaign and the alignment of the UAW with the Trump administration on the basis of America First chauvinism underscores

the utterly reactionary role of the unions, which long ago ceased to be workers’ organizations. The UAW is throwing a political lifeline to the Trump administration in the midst of mass protests against the right-wing, anti-democratic measures being enacted by the White House.

The UAW has a long and unsavory record of using nationalist poison to divert the anger of autoworkers over the destruction of jobs. The aim of its promotion of Buy American nationalism is to pit workers in the United States against their brother auto workers, in Canada, Mexico, Brazil, China and all over the world in a battle for who can work for the cheapest wages and lowest costs. The Buy American strategy of the UAW and the campaign against NAFTA has not resulted in the defense of a single job. It has, however, coincided with the imposition of round after round of concessions onto the backs of auto workers, with the full collaboration of the UAW.

The promotion of economic nationalism by the UAW takes place amidst signs of the winding down of the auto sales boom of recent years and the resumption of layoffs in the auto industry. GM recently announced the indefinite layoff of over 3,000 workers at three plants in Ohio and Michigan, including 1,300 workers at the Detroit-Hamtramck assembly plant whose last day is March 3.

At the same time, Ford has announced a spate of temporary layoffs at its facilities, and Fiat Chrysler is in the midst of a restructuring that involves the idling of several plants, including the six-month shutdown of part of the Jeep complex in Toledo, Ohio.

The layoffs underscore the false claims by UAW that the 2015 sellout agreements with Detroit automakers

contained job protections. In fact, the deals facilitated layoffs by expanding the number of temporary workers who are not eligible for supplemental unemployment benefits and other protections.

The promotion of America First chauvinism by the UAW dovetails with the anti-immigrant hysteria of the Trump administration. While the UAW has made a pro forma criticism of Trump's ban on immigrants from seven majority Muslim countries, the attempt to scapegoat workers in other countries for the failure of the capitalist profit system has an inevitable logic.

This was tragically demonstrated in the case of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American man brutally murdered by two Chrysler foremen who thought he was Japanese. The killing, on June 19, 1982, took place in the midst of a ferocious anti-Japanese campaign promoted by the UAW and the Democratic Party, blaming imports for the loss of US jobs. The campaign included UAW officials smashing Toyota automobiles with sledgehammers.

American workers are objectively united with autoworkers globally in a production process integrated across continents and oceans. Any attempt to retrench production within the bounds of national borders would entail a massive step backward for mankind in terms of the development of the productive forces.

Not only is the UAW-Trump campaign to Buy American reactionary, it is absurd. This has been at least partially conceded by the UAW, which has had great difficulty putting together a list of built-in-America vehicles, given the domination of production by transnational companies that operate all over the world.

For example, most of the vehicles sold in the US by Japanese-based automakers Honda and Toyota are also built in the US. Honda alone employs some 30,000 workers in the United States. Meanwhile, many vehicles sold in the US by the Detroit-based auto companies are assembled outside the US, with parts sourced in multiple countries.

The promotion of nationalism is also aimed at preparing the population for war. The identification of the interests of American workers with "their" own American corporate bosses and billionaires is aimed at preserving the myth of a unified American nation without internal class divisions. It is part of the preparations for lining up American workers against

their brothers and sisters internationally, whether in China, Russia, Iran or whatever is the next target of US imperialism.

The promotion of nationalist snake oil by the UAW has nothing to do with the defense of jobs. It is not workers in other countries that are behind job insecurity, low wages and brutal working conditions, but the capitalist profit system that subordinates the rights of workers to the amassing of wealth by a handful of billionaires.

Jobs can only be defended by workers through a break with the UAW and its nationalist, pro capitalist program and by uniting with their counterparts overseas in a common struggle against the transnational companies. This means the building of an independent political movement of the working class aimed at reorganizing world production on the basis of meeting human need, not profit.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact