Auto bosses, UAW join Trump at Michigan event to push nationalism and militarism

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President Donald Trump made a strident appeal to nationalism, corporatism and militarism in a speech Wednesday in the Detroit suburb of Ypsilanti, where he signaled his readiness to provide the Big Three US automakers with a massive profit windfall by weakening fuel economy standards.

The CEOs of General Motors, Ford and Fiat Chrysler offered workers free transportation and lunch and a work holiday, in the cases of GM and Fiat Chrysler with full pay, to attend the rally, demonstrating their enthusiastic support for Trump's gutting of corporate regulations and plans for sweeping corporate tax cuts. Trump's gift to the auto bosses reflected the real class interests underlying his pseudo-populist demagogy about rebuilding US manufacturing and restoring industrial jobs.

So did his silence on mass layoffs carried out in recent weeks by General Motors, including the elimination of 1,300 jobs through the closure of a shift at the Detroit-Hamtramck plant and the slashing of 1,100 jobs in Lansing, Michigan. Instead, Trump praised the auto bosses for recent announcements of several hundred new jobs in Michigan and Ohio.

The presence of United Auto Workers President Dennis Williams, who sat next to Trump on a panel with Ford CEO Mark Fields, underscored the support of the union bureaucracy for Trump's "America First" trade war and militarist agenda. Following Trump's election, Williams declared his support for the new administration's opposition to the Trans-Pacific Partnership and his promise to renegotiate North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Williams announced last month that the union would be reviving its chauvinistic "Buy American" campaign.

Some local UAW officials, well aware of growing disillusionment and anger against Trump among the rank-and-file, sought to distance themselves from the UAW International's participation in the rally. UAW Local 372 in Trenton, Michigan distributed fliers headlined "Trump Rally Not Endorsed by the UAW," urging workers at Fiat Chrysler's Trenton Engine Plant not to attend the event. The president of UAW Local 1700 at Fiat Chrysler's Sterling Heights Assembly Plant publicly turned down an invitation to attend the rally.

Trump gave his remarks at the decommissioned Willow Run manufacturing complex 30 miles west of Detroit before a staged audience of several hundred employees. Non-union salaried employees as well as UAW production workers were bussed to and from the event by the automakers. The former General Motors facility, shuttered in 2010 as part of the Obama administration's restructuring of the auto industry, is being transformed into a proving ground for automated vehicles, to be known as the American Center for Mobility.

"My administration will work tirelessly to eliminate the industry-killing regulations, to lower the job-crushing taxes, and to ensure a level playing field for all American companies and workers," Trump promised.

Present along with Trump, the Big Three CEOs and Williams was Environmental Protection Agency Director Scott Pruitt, a long-time opponent of restrictions on corporate pollution and other restraints on profit-making.

In his remarks, Trump called on the assembled corporate and union leaders to pledge to "Buy American and Hire American," and declared that US industries would soon see war-time levels of production.

Ominously alluding to his plans for a huge military

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build-up, Trump noted, “Seventy-five years ago, during the Second World War, thousands of American workers filled this very building to build the great new airplanes--the B-24 Liberator. At peak production--listen to this--it’s not the country that we’ve been watching over the last 20 years--they were building one B-24 every single hour. We don’t hear that. We don’t hear that anymore, do we? We’ll be back. We’ll be back soon.”

Reprising the fascistic themes of his inaugural address, he said, “We must embrace a new economic model. Let’s call it ‘The American Model’... Under this system, we will reduce burdens on our companies and on our businesses. But, in exchange, companies must hire and grow in America… That is how we will succeed and grow together--American workers and American industry side by side. Nobody can beat us, folks. Nobody can beat us. Because whether we are rich or poor, young or old, black or brown or white, we all bleed the same red blood of patriots.”

The UAW has officially embraced this doctrine of corporatism since the 1980s, espousing the supposed unity of interests between workers and “their own” American bosses in the struggle for markets and profits against American capitalism’s foreign rivals. It has not called a major nationwide industrial action in nearly four decades while working to convince US autoworkers that their fellow workers in Mexico, Canada, Europe, Latin America and Asia are their enemies. The result has been the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs and a catastrophic decline in wages, benefits and working conditions.

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