

AFL-CIO president leaves Trump's Manufacturing Council: An exercise in hypocrisy and damage control

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AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka resigned from Trump's Presidential Council on Manufacturing on Tuesday, professing alleged shock over the President's remarks defending the Nazis and KKK members who precipitated the fascist riot over the weekend in Charlottesville, Virginia. His departure followed the resignation of several corporate CEOs, including Scott Paul, the president of the Alliance for American Manufacturing. On Wednesday the council disbanded, as other CEOs left the panel.

Trump's remarks Tuesday were unprecedented for a US president. He defended the fascists who went on a rampage over the weekend that left 19 injured and led to the death of 32-year-old anti-fascist protester Heather Heyer.

In leaving the panel Trumka issued a statement declaring, "I cannot sit on a council for a President that tolerates bigotry and domestic terrorism." Apparently nothing Trump has done previously, during his first seven months in office, was too much for Trumka—the Muslim ban, the persecution of immigrants, the rescinding of workplace safety and environmental regulations, and the formation of a cabinet of billionaires, ex-generals and outright fascists.

Trumka's action, which was joined by AFL-CIO deputy chief of staff Thea Lea, the other union representative on the council, had very much the character of someone putting their finger to the wind. Seeing the Trump administration abandoned by a significant section of corporate CEOs, the AFL-CIO leader decided to follow their lead.

Explaining his decision not to resign earlier, Trumka said that only on Tuesday, when Trump gave a "spirited" defense of the KKK and neo-Nazis, did he

decide that he had to distance himself from the White House.

Trumka's claim of outraged innocence over Trump's remarks will not convince anyone with a functioning memory. Only a short while ago the AFL-CIO president was heaping praise on Trump for the latter's reactionary America First program of extreme economic nationalism. In response to Trump's signing of an executive order in April instructing government agencies to use only American steel and other products for federally funded projects, Trumka went into raptures. "We welcome efforts to improve the effectiveness of 'Buy American' and 'Hire American,' both of which commit taxpayer funds to support good jobs and businesses in America," he declared.

Trumka has claimed that the Trump administration is divided between a pro-worker wing and a "Wall Street wing." In remarks to the *Wall Street Journal* the AFL-CIO president made it clear that the faction the unions were looking to as pro-worker included fascist White House advisor Steve Bannon.

In remarks this spring at the National Press Club Trumka had warm words for the President, declaring, "I promise you that America's labor leaders will always find an open door with Donald Trump." Trumka and other union officials then applauded as Trump launched into his standard rant against foreigners who are supposedly stealing America's wealth, and his denunciations of "illegal immigration."

The AFL-CIO president is not alone among US union leaders attracted to Trump's fascistic demagoguery. United Auto Workers President Dennis Williams appeared alongside Trump and auto CEOs on a panel in

March to push the president's nationalist, "Buy American" agenda of trade war.

In April United Steelworkers President Leo Gerard stood with Trump at a signing ceremony for an executive order to investigate the alleged "dumping" of Chinese steel. In fact, Trump appointed Wilbur Ross, a billionaire financier and long-time collaborator of the USW, to the post of commerce secretary. In a speech at a USW convention in Las Vegas Gerard praised Trump, saying he was "giving speeches against unfair trade that sound like tape recordings of speeches I made."

There is an affinity between the American trade union bureaucracy and the Trump administration, particularly figures such as Bannon. Based on its program of extreme nationalism and anti-communism, the union bureaucracy is a culture broth for the growth of fascist tendencies.

This was reinforced in the 1980s when the UAW and other unions adopted the program of corporatist union-management collaboration. This was accompanied by the promotion of ferocious anti-Japanese chauvinism and economic nationalism. As the *Bulletin* newspaper, a forerunner of the *World Socialist Web Site*, noted at the time, the corporatist program of the unions had many similarities to that of the labor syndicates established by Italian fascism.

In practice the unions have long abandoned any defense of the most elementary rights of the working class. Based on their nationalist program they work to increase the exploitation of the working class in the name of increasing the "competitiveness" of American big business against its overseas rivals.

Trumka's decision to participate on the manufacturing council, alongside a pack of multi-millionaire CEOs, was itself an expression of the right-wing program of the unions. Among those on the panel were a host of vicious enemies of the working class, including such figures as General Electric Chairman Jeff Immelt, Dow Chemical Company CEO Andrew Liveris, and Marilyn Hewson, CEO of Lockheed Martin.

In the same statement announcing his departure from the manufacturing council, Trumka expressed disappointment in the body, which he called another "broken promise" to working people by the Trump administration, because of its failure to prosecute

aggressive trade war measures. In passing, Trumka made the damning admission that the council itself was a "subterfuge," aimed at providing a cover for the deregulation of industry.

In fact, a major purpose of the council was to enlist the services of the unions in policing the working class and helping force through reactionary measures aimed at eliminating workplace protections and slashing taxes in order to drive up corporate profits.

Even as Trumka resigned from the manufacturing council, he issued a statement offering support to the Trump administration in the opening of talks aimed at the renegotiation of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). In a press release Monday, the AFL-CIO president expressed his support for the talks, declaring, "As renegotiations begin today, there is an incredible opportunity to replace this fundamentally flawed trade deal with new rules that work for working families. But how we do it matters. The administration can choose to use this opportunity to benefit working families, or it can further rig the rules to favor corporations and CEOs."

Trumka did not explain in his statement how a government that defends Nazis could carry out policies to "benefit working families." In fact the entire project is aimed at using nationalist demagoguery to divide the working class as the ruling class carries out an assault on workers in the United States, Mexico and Canada aimed at gutting workplace and environmental regulations and slashing wages.

Serious opposition to the growth of right-wing extremist and fascist forces requires a break by the working class with the anti-worker program of the AFL-CIO and the building of new organizations of struggle. This fight must be animated by a socialist and internationalist program, in direct opposition to the reactionary nationalist poison promoted by the likes of Trumka.



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