

# UAW President Dennis Williams backs Trump's policies of militarism and trade war

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At a media roundtable last Thursday, United Auto Workers President Dennis Williams spelled out the union's support for the recent announcement by the Trump administration that it is ordering a "national security" investigation into auto imports. The move could result in tariffs of as high as 25 percent under section 232 of 1962 legislation invoked by the White House to impose tariffs on steel and aluminum earlier this year.

In response to a question from a reporter, Williams declared his support for Trump "when he is working within the best interests of working men and women in this country, such as trade ..."

He continued, "The US has become a dumping ground for a lot of countries ... I thought we should be looking at imports a long time ago."

The line-up of the UAW behind the viciously anti-working class Trump administration is hardly surprising. The extreme economic nationalism promoted by the UAW, the United Steelworkers (USW) and other unions dovetails with the fascistic "America First" nationalism of the far-right, including forces such as former Trump advisor Stephen Bannon.

The protectionist policies being pursued by the Trump administration against international rivals of US corporations have provoked warnings from sections of the ruling class of a descent into all-out trade war and the kind of beggar-thy-neighbor policies that preceded the outbreak of the Second World War. This includes pitting the US against supposed allies such as Germany and Canada.

Williams and other union leaders are in the camp of the most right-wing, fascistic ruling class advocates of economic nationalism and militarism.

Responding to another question, Williams said he agreed with the assertion by Trump that protectionist

measures were an issue of national security, implicitly acknowledging the connection between trade war and military war. "I do know," he said, "there has always been a question, do we have the kind of technology and equipment to protect our country and our allies?"

He added, "I do support anytime we look at these things. I do think they ought to evaluate—are they dumping or saturating the market so that it's a detriment to our industries? I think that's important to us as a nation, important to our sovereignty. People are free traders to the detriment of our country."

Workers should recall that Williams appeared with Trump and then-Ford CEO Mark Fields at a former bomber factory outside Detroit, Michigan last year. At the event, Trump praised the World War II alliance between the corporations, the unions and the Roosevelt administration for the purpose of ramping up war production.

William's line-up with Trump follows similar statements by United Steelworkers President Leo Gerard, who praised Trump's proposed tariffs on imported steel and aluminum, claiming they would be a boon for US steelworkers.

The public backing of the UAW and USW for the policies of the Trump administration comes as social tensions are intensifying, evidenced by the recent teachers' strikes and signs of growing restiveness among autoworkers. The UAW is ramping up its efforts to deflect the anger of autoworkers outward, against workers overseas, with the claim that they are taking "American" jobs.

The other side of the economic nationalist coin is corporatism—the complete subordination of workers to the profit interests of their American bosses. This reactionary perspective has produced decades of factory closures, mass layoffs and wage and benefit

concessions, imposed with the indispensable assistance of the UAW. It is the basis on which the UAW and the rest of the unions have been transformed into industrial police and labor contractors for American big business.

The anti-working class character of the UAW has been further exposed by a widening corruption scandal involving company bribes to top union negotiators in exchange for pushing through pro-company contracts, such as the 2015 Big Three agreements that reinforced the hated two-tier wage and benefit system and expanded the use of brutally exploited temporary part-time autoworkers.

While generally praising Trump, in the course of his remarks Williams claimed to be opposed to Trump's termination of the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program, which protects some undocumented immigrants from deportation, calling it "inhumane." Here Williams is talking out of both sides of his mouth.

There is a direct and inseparable connection between the promotion of nationalism and militarism and the cultivation of xenophobia and anti-immigrant racism. World War I and World War II saw the witch-hunting of immigrants, including the round-up and internment of 100,000 Japanese-Americans by the Roosevelt administration. In 1982, the UAW's promotion of anti-Japanese chauvinism played a major role in the beating death of Chinese-American Vincent Chin by a Chrysler foreman and his unemployed son.

The UAW is in direct contact with the White House over terms for the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), pressing for a border tax and tariffs on Mexican imports.

In an attempt to cover up its scape-goating of Mexican workers, the UAW has claimed to be in favor of "independent unions" and higher compensation for Mexican workers, calling for penalties to be imposed on the Mexican auto industry unless it raises wages to \$16 an hour. The cynicism of this demand is breathtaking under conditions where large sections of US autoworkers, including some temporary part-time workers at UAW plants, make considerably less than \$16. Wages of \$11 an hour or less are common in parts plants.

The miserable wages and pervasive poverty in Mexico and all across Latin America are the product of more than a century of oppression by US imperialism.

US corporations have drained the resources of all the lands south of the border while propping up right-wing regimes to suppress the masses.

As for "independent unions," there is not an ounce of independence in the UAW, which serves as a tool of the auto bosses for maintaining "labor peace" and imposing wage and benefit concessions and speedup.

The fraud of Williams' claim to sympathize with the plight of Mexican workers is further exposed by the refusal of the UAW to support strikes and protests by Mexican autoworkers or organize any coordinated action between US and Mexican workers. Williams is well aware that any attempt to significantly raise the wages of Mexican autoworkers, or, for that matter, US autoworkers, would trigger ruthless opposition from the transnational car companies and threaten the union's cushy relationship with management.

The attacks on autoworkers are not the result of "unfair trade." They are the result of the capitalist economic system.

Private ownership of the means of production is incompatible with a decent life for workers in any part of the globe. A serious fight to raise wages and defend jobs requires a struggle by American workers in unity with their brothers and sisters in Mexico, Canada and around the world against the transnational monopolies.

This requires a break with the UAW and the building of independent rank-and-file factory committees as the genuine voice of autoworkers.



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