

The betrayals of the UAW and the rise of right-wing militias in Michigan

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Less than a week after the arrest of 13 men for plotting to kidnap and kill the Michigan governor and incite civil war on the eve of the US presidential elections, the matter has largely been swept under the rug by the news media and the Democratic Party.

The Democrats, terrified of anything that will provoke a social movement from below, are covering up the broader significance of the plot and its connection to the political strategy of the Trump administration to stoke fascistic violence in the runup to the elections. In this they are assisted by the AFL-CIO labor federation and various trade unions, which are doing nothing to alert, let alone mobilize, workers who would be the main targets of Trump's efforts to overthrow the US Constitution and impose a presidential dictatorship.

The Teamsters, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association and the majority of unions have remained silent on the Michigan coup plot. The AFL-CIO and the United Auto Workers (UAW) have issued perfunctory press releases. Echoing the line of the Democrats, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka declared that the threat of the far right could be countered by "voting for hope and unity" and electing "Biden to the White House and the haters back to irrelevance."

UAW President Rory Gamble issued a short statement noting that what was uncovered was a "very real plot to destabilize the government in Michigan and to stoke extremist civil war in our country." He did not propose that workers do anything about it, however, and focused his comment largely on thanking the FBI and "our men and women in blue" for having "saved our democracy."

Historically, the fight against the influence of the far right has always been centered on the struggle of the labor movement to unite workers as a class against the fascist demagogues and their big business financiers, who try to weaken and divide workers with their anti-Semitic, racist and nationalist agitation. The UAW and other industrial

unions were established in the 1930s through the struggle of socialist-minded workers to develop class consciousness and politically inoculate workers against the fascist poison peddled by the likes of the KKK, Father Coughlin in Michigan and the Nazi-supporter Henry Ford.

But what was left of the "labor movement" in the United States died long ago. The UAW, in particular, is nothing more than a corporatist syndicate, many of whose executives have been indicted for accepting bribes from the companies and stealing workers' dues money. The beginning of the end was the political subordination of the unions to the Democratic Party and through the Democrats to the capitalist system. This included the anticommunist purges of the late 1940s and 1950s, led by UAW President Walter Reuther, and the embrace of American imperialism, which was at the heart of the merger of the AFL and CIO in 1955.

By the 1980s, with the American ruling class shifting to a policy of class war in response to the loss of its dominant world position, the UAW and other unions adopted the corporatist outlook of labor-management partnership and collaborated in the defeat of strikes, wage-cutting, and the shutdown of factories and massive job losses. This went hand in hand with the promotion of "Buy American" chauvinism and the racist scapegoating of workers in Japan and other countries for "stealing American jobs."

It is not an apology for the fascistic elements involved in the Michigan coup plot to note that the economic devastation in that state and other industrial centers in the United States, overseen by the unions, has created the conditions for the extreme right to recruit and find support.

The profiles of the 13 coup plotters reveal that several were small businessmen, ex-soldiers or lower-paid employees living in small towns and suburban areas outside economically ravaged cities. Most faced

significant economic and social distress, including the loss of employment and income and pressure to pay unpaid taxes.

The militia movement in Michigan got started in the 1990s as deindustrialization, carried out with the collusion of the UAW, led to the shutdown of hundreds of factories in cities like Detroit, Flint, Pontiac, Grand Rapids and other areas. Between 1999 and 2009, another 460,000 manufacturing jobs were wiped out in Michigan, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The median wage for a Michigan factory worker today is \$16.03 an hour, a third less than the \$24.00 an hour in inflation-adjusted dollars such a worker earned in 1972.

Last year, Michigan incomes finally topped their pre-Great Recession levels after nearly 12 years, before the pandemic hit, driving them down again. Nearly 26 percent of the state's residents reported that eviction or foreclosure in the next two months is either very likely or somewhat likely, according to a weekly US Census Bureau survey in late August.

The activities of militia groups in Michigan, Pennsylvania and other hard-hit industrial states tapered off after the April 1995 Oklahoma City bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, which killed 168 people, including 19 children. Before the bombing, Timothy McVeigh, who was the son of a longtime UAW member in economically depressed western New York, attended early meetings of the Michigan Militia, one of the predecessors of the Wolverine Watchmen, which planned to kill Governor Gretchen Whitmer.

The militias, however, were given new life by the economic devastation wrought under the eight years of the Obama administration, which oversaw the continued destruction of workers' jobs and living standards after the 2008-09 Wall Street bailout.

Trump's victory in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin in 2016 was not the product of "racism" of white workers, as the Hillary Clinton campaign and other apologists of the Democratic Party claimed. Instead, it was a shift by a section of working-class voters, including many who had voted for Obama, to Trump or third parties, or abstention, leading to the defeat of Clinton, who made no secret of her contempt for the working class.

AFL-CIO President Trumka's claims that the danger of fascist violence will miraculously disappear if Biden manages to get into the White House are patently false. On the contrary, if Biden wins the election and is helped into office by sections of the military, as the Democrats

hope, he will be committed to a program of ruthless austerity to pay for the \$4 trillion CARES Act bailout and more aggressive militarism. This will only fuel the growth of the fascists.

Having created the conditions for the rise of the far right through their corporatist and nationalist policies and their subordination of the working class to the Democratic Party, the unions are doing nothing to mobilize workers against the homicidal policy of the ruling elite in response to the pandemic. The struggles by workers that have erupted—including the walkouts by autoworkers in March during the first peak of the pandemic—were organized independently of and in opposition to these anti-working class organizations.

The fascistic groups behind the Michigan plot do not yet have a mass following. However, the economic havoc caused by the pandemic—mass unemployment, evictions, the bankruptcy and closure of small business and the wiping out of savings—can fuel the growth of the far right if it is not countered with a movement of the working class, mobilizing behind it broader sections of the middle class.

This requires the formation of independent rank-and-file factory, workplace and neighborhood committees, independent of the unions and both corporate-controlled parties, to unify workers of all races and ethnic backgrounds in defense of jobs, health care, safety and social and democratic rights.

Measures to combat the pandemic must be combined with policies to secure the livelihoods and interests of all those affected by it. This can only be done through a struggle against capitalism and a radical redistribution of wealth from the billionaires who hoard it to workers who produce it.

What has taken place in Michigan is a warning. Whatever happens in the election, the ruling class is moving toward authoritarian and dictatorial forms of rule. The struggle against the danger of fascism must be waged through the organization of the working class in a political movement against capitalism and for socialism.



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