

Teamsters bureaucracy holds private “roundtable” meeting with Trump

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The UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee is holding an emergency online meeting this Sunday, February 4, at 7:00 p.m. Eastern Time: “Organize the rank and file to fight the job cuts at UPS! Unite with autoworkers, tech workers and the whole working class against layoffs!” Register for the meeting here.

On Wednesday, the Teamsters union’s General Executive Board met privately with would-be Führer Donald Trump in a “candidate roundtable.”

The Teamsters union has presented the meeting as a formality, part of a series of such meetings with all declared candidates before it gives a formal endorsement.

But there was nothing ordinary about the meeting. The top officials of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters met for an hour behind closed doors with a fascist, who has already attempted once to overthrow the US Constitution. The fact that such a meeting could take place, as well as the fact that Trump is the leading candidate for the nomination of the Republican Party, testifies to the deep crisis of American democracy.

The meeting also underscored the hostility of the union bureaucracy to the working class. Significantly, it occurred only one day after UPS announced 12,000 layoffs, part of a growing wave of job cuts across the world in which automation and artificial intelligence are playing major roles. Thousands of job cuts have also been announced in the auto industry, which is in the middle of the shift to less labor-intensive electrical vehicles.

This was made possible by the sellout contract that the Teamsters forced through at UPS last July, which contains no protections against such cuts. While the positions being cut are allegedly all non-union management roles, the company is also slashing shifts in its warehouses and plans to triple its use of automation over the course of the year.

The meeting also took place weeks after Teamsters General President Sean O’Brien met with Trump at his estate in Mar-A-Lago, Florida, likewise in a closed-door meeting. At the time, responding to O’Brien’s claim that the meeting was a “productive discussion on workers’

issues,” the WSWs wrote, “the interests of workers could find no reflection in a secret meeting” between the corrupt sellout artist O’Brien and would-be dictator Trump. The same could be said of Wednesday’s roundtable.

The Teamsters allowed Trump to hold a 20-minute press conference after the meeting in its national headquarters, from a podium carrying the Teamsters logo and in front of a Teamsters flag. From this bully pulpit provided by the union, he launched into a full-throated attack on immigrants, declaring that the US was being overwhelmed with people coming from “prisons” and “insane asylums.”

In shorter remarks to the press conference following Trump, O’Brien adopted a friendly attitude towards Trump, referring to him as “Don” and saying the meeting went “fine.” He also made a lame attempt to distance the union from the most provocative parts of Trump’s attacks on immigrants.

Nevertheless, the Teamsters deliberately gave Trump a platform to make a right-wing pitch to American workers. He proclaimed that immigration and foreign trade, particularly with China, were the cause of poverty for American workers. Immigration was a “killer for the Teamsters,” he said. He also claimed, without evidence, that he had massive support from rank-and-file Teamsters members, including that he won a majority of Teamster members in the 2020 election.

Describing the roundtable meeting as “productive,” Trump said that he had a good relationship with the unions in his business dealings in New York City. Those comments were revealing for what they said about the pro-corporate character of the union bureaucracy. Trump, after all, is not only a candidate but a billionaire real estate speculator and a member of the oligarchy to whom the union apparatus has sold out workers for decades.

Trump also denounced the United Auto Workers’ endorsement of Biden last week, on the grounds that the shift towards electric vehicles is a “disaster” that would only benefit China. Through such remarks, Trump attempted to leverage anger over layoffs in the auto industry in a right-

wing direction into support for a conflict with China.

He also attacked Biden's policy in the Middle East, claiming that the fact that the United States is on the brink of war with Iran was the product of the "weakness" of the policy of the White House. In fact, whatever tactical differences exist, Biden's policy is in fundamental alignment with the basic aim of the Trump administration of reasserting imperialist control over the Middle East and toppling the Iranian regime.

Summing up his chances of ultimately receiving the Teamsters' endorsement, Trump remarked, "stranger things have happened." But while this would go against the conventional wisdom that the Teamsters and the other unions will endorse the Democratic candidate, the fact that Trump is being held up as a possibility—and it cannot be excluded at this point, especially given the extremely unstable political situation in the United States—expresses the corporatist and essentially fascist outlook of the union bureaucracy.

The apparatus has long functioned as an industrial police force joined at the hip with management, devoting all of its efforts to sabotaging strikes and enforcing sellouts. Ideologically, the union bureaucracy has always been dominated by extreme nationalism and anticommunism, falsely proclaiming the unity of interests between American workers and the corporations in fighting the enemies of US capitalism.

Trump is also able to benefit from the fact that Biden, while proclaiming that he is the country's last best chance for democracy, is carrying out ultra-right policies, including support for neo-Nazis in Ukraine and genocide in Gaza. Both candidates support a war with China and, in their own ways, attempt to present such a conflict as in the interests of American workers.

During his acceptance speech at the UAW's Political Action Conference last week, Biden cited the massive industrial buildup during World War II, which temporarily boosted employment and wages for factory workers, as the precedent to his policies and declared that "aircraft carriers, tanks [and] automobiles" had to be built in the United States.

Biden, the self-proclaimed "most pro-labor president in US history," is attempting to recreate in the present the union-government alliance during World War II, in which the unions enforced a no-strike pledge and witch-hunted opponents of capitalism and imperialism. Every major sellout contract, from UPS to the auto industry, the railroads, the docks and others, has been rammed through in close collaboration with the White House, which hopes to use the bureaucracy to discipline and restrain the working class.

But while the unions of the 1940s, in spite of their treacherous and opportunist leadership, were built in the

years before through massive working class struggles, the unions today are, to a far higher degree, creatures of the state and the stock market.

The class function of the bureaucracy was on display Thursday, when Biden made an appearance in Detroit at the invitation of the UAW, behind a phalanx of riot police to protect him from antiwar demonstrators. Last week, union bureaucrats also dragged out protesters from the hall when they attempted to interrupt Biden's speech accepting the union's endorsement.

The presidential election as a whole testifies to the terminal crisis of American democracy. The fascist Trump expresses this most directly, but this crisis was not created by Trump, and the drive towards dictatorship proceeds across the whole spectrum of American capitalist politics.

Policies aimed at enriching and defending the wealth of a tiny oligarchy, including through world war, cannot be imposed while keeping the outward trappings of democracy. The union bureaucracy itself is fully implicated in this crisis. Nothing can be ruled out, including the possibility that substantial sections may go openly for Trump. But whatever the form it takes, the function of the union bureaucracy in this situation is to strangle the independence of the working class and police the boundaries of this crisis to prevent an intervention from below.

The task facing workers is the development of their own independent response to the crisis, based on an anti-capitalist and socialist program. This task is bound up with the struggle to abolish the corrupt trade union apparatus and establish rank-and-file power through the development of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.



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