

Trump says pick for US labor secretary will work toward “historic cooperation between business and labor”

Jerry White

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On Friday, President-elect Donald Trump nominated Republican Congresswoman Lori Chavez-DeRemer of Oregon for secretary of the US Labor Department. The nomination was immediately hailed by Teamsters President Sean O’Brien, AFL-CIO President Liz Schuler and the leaders of both teacher unions.

The nomination was opposed by right-wing news outlets and business groups for running counter, in the words of the *Wall Street Journal* editorial board, to the president-elect’s supposed “agenda of devolving power to the states, expanding school choice, empowering workers and easing business regulation.”

But the selection of Chavez-DeRemer—who combines right-wing politics with support for the institutional and financial interests of the labor bureaucracy—will not interfere with the incoming administration’s program of social counterrevolution. On the contrary, it is aimed at drawing in sections of the union apparatus to suppress the inevitable explosion of working class opposition to the destruction of core social and democratic rights, the deportation of millions of immigrants and the gutting of any restrictions on the exploitation of the working class.

If that fails, Trump plans to deploy far more direct methods of state and extra-parliamentary repression against strikes, mass protests and other collective actions by the working class.

Chavez-DeRemer is one of only three Republicans in the US House of Representatives to co-sponsor the AFL-CIO-backed Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act. Among other things, the bill would place restrictions on designating workers as contractors and would make it an unfair labor practice for employers to coerce workers to attend anti-union meetings. In a sop to the labor bureaucracy, it would also require all employees covered by a labor agreement to pay unions for the “cost of representation,” regardless of state Right-to-Work laws to the contrary.

The Oregon Republican also backed the Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act, which sets a minimum nationwide standard for the collective bargaining rights of public sector workers.

Chavez-DeRemer’s support for the bills was largely symbolic since there was never a chance that they would be adopted by the Senate, regardless of which party was in control.

Far from being a champion of workers’ rights, Chavez-DeRemer is a Trump loyalist, who supported his tax cuts for the rich and regularly denounces the “radical left.” A multi-millionaire co-owner, with her husband, of Anesthesia Associates Northwest in Portland, Oregon, she had a net worth of between \$3,954,010 and \$17,129,998, according to her House Candidate Personal Financial Disclosure, filed on October

15, 2021.

After losing her bid for reelection on November 5, Chavez-DeRemer posted on X on November 15 that Trump had a “clear mandate” to “fix our Southern border, reduce crime and restore our economy.” Four days later, she claimed, “President Trump expanded on his Working Class coalition by speaking directly to hardworking Americans. This is a true political realignment. We must continue to be the party of the American Worker, with President Trump leading the way!”

To claim that the corporate and financial oligarchs who control the Republican Party speak for the working class is a monumental fraud. Trump only prevailed because of the collapse of support for the Democratic Party, whose indifference to the economic and social concerns of the working class, along with its obsession with identity politics and single-minded focus on expanding US imperialism’s wars for global domination, allowed Trump to exploit popular discontent and win the election.

In his November 22 statement on the nomination of Chavez-DeRemer, Trump declared, “Together, we will achieve historic cooperation between Business and Labor that will restore the American Dream for Working Families.”

There are other sections of the incoming administration who have also cozied up to the labor bureaucracy. In early 2021, US Senator from Florida Marco Rubio—Trump’s current nominee for secretary of state—supported the unionization campaign by the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) at the Amazon facility in Bessemer, Alabama. In a *USA Today* column Rubio wrote at the time that he was generally against “adversarial” relationships between employers and employees, but Amazon should be punished for “bowing to China” and putting its corporate interests before national interests.

Fertile ground for fascism

With its rabid anti-communism, economic nationalism and fear and hatred of the militancy of the working class, the American labor bureaucracy has long been fertile ground for fascism. Trump’s election will draw these reactionary layers ever closer to the incoming administration while others—more aligned with the discredited Democratic Party—are being attracted to Trump to preserve their

income and assets from an inevitable upheaval by the working class.

Teamsters President Sean O'Brien has led the charge of union bureaucrats into Trump's arms. In an X statement on the nomination, O'Brien said:

Thank you @realDonaldTrump for putting American workers first by nominating Rep. Lori Chavez-DeRemer for US Labor Secretary. Nearly a year ago, you joined us for a @Teamsters roundtable and pledged to listen to workers and find common ground to protect and respect labor in America. You put words into action. ... Congratulations to @LChavezDeRemer on your nomination! North America's strongest union is ready to work with you every step of the way to expand good union jobs and rebuild our nation's middle class. Let's get to work! #TeamsterStrong

Before the election, O'Brien was a featured speaker at the Republican National Convention, and the Teamsters bureaucracy all but endorsed Trump by withholding an endorsement of a Democratic nominee for the first time in three decades. At the same time, the Teamsters bureaucracy endorsed the fascist US senator from Missouri and January 6 conspirator Josh Hawley.

In a November 13 video interview with the far-right *The Free Press* internet media outlet, O'Brien signaled his support for Trump's anti-immigrant crackdown.

"The immigration issue is a real issue. I'll speak on a couple of angles on this. Number one, we're all products of immigrants somewhere. My great-grandfather and great-grandmother came over from Ireland, they came over the right way. I have a problem when people come into this country with the agenda to commit crimes and do things that are not popular in America. That's a problem."

AFL-CIO President Liz Schuler praised Chavez-DeRemer's "pro-labor record in Congress" but attempted to distance herself from the incoming administration's "dramatically anti-worker agenda." She concluded by saying, "The AFL-CIO will work with anyone who wants to do right by workers, but we will reject and defeat any attempt to roll back the rights and protections that working people have won with decades of blood, sweat, and tears."

National Education Association President Becky Pringle praised Chavez-DeRemer but said educators "hope to hear a pledge from her to continue to stand up for workers and students as her record suggests, not blind loyalty to the Project 2025 agenda."

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten was more obsequious towards the incoming administration, declaring: "It is significant that the Pres-elect nominated Rep. Chavez-DeRemer for Labor. Her record suggests real support of workers & their right to unionize. I hope it means the Trump admin will actually respect collective bargaining and workers' voices from Teamsters to teachers."

Weingarten spent much of the first Trump administration traveling from state to state to beat back the teachers' wildcat strikes against austerity and school privatization in West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona in 2018-19. She has also given her full-throated support to Trump's pick to head the Department of Education, billionaire wrestling executive Linda McMahon. A longtime US State Department operative, Weingarten is no stranger to working with fascists, including in the Ukrainian regime.

The leaders of the German trade unions also tried to prove their worthiness to the Hitler regime after it came to power in 1933, even marching under the swastika on May 1. That did not stop the Nazis the following day from raiding the trade union offices, arresting and murdering numerous trade union officials and disbanding the ADGB union federation.

Under the four years of the Biden administration, the labor bureaucracy played a critical role in suppressing mass opposition to the profits-before-lives pandemic policy and the efforts to impose the increasing costs of the transition to a war economy on the backs of the working class. This was summed up in Biden's statement that the AFL-CIO was his "domestic NATO."

In examining the current integration of the union bureaucracy into the incoming Trump administration, it is worthwhile to recall the words of Leon Trotsky in his 1940 work *Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay*:

The labor bureaucrats do their level best in words and deeds to demonstrate to the "democratic" state how reliable and indispensable they are in peace-time and especially in time of war. By transforming the trade unions into organs of the state, fascism invents nothing new; it merely draws to their ultimate conclusion the tendencies inherent in imperialism.

The last four years have seen an immense growth of the class struggle throughout the world and within the United States. This includes the overwhelming rejection of sellout contracts and militant strikes, which have increasingly taken the form of an open revolt against the pro-capitalist and pro-war labor bureaucracy. This will only intensify as the naked class interests Trump speaks for become apparent to masses of workers, including the millions who voted for him.

This resistance will require the formation of new organizations of working class self-determination--rank-and-file committees, which operate independently of and in opposition to the union bureaucracies. The development of an industrial and political counteroffensive against the incoming Trump administration will require a conscious political struggle by the working class against both corporate-controlled parties and the capitalist system they defend.



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