Controversy over Trump's new Bureau of Labor Statistics chief

Nick Beams
13 August 2025

The appointment by US President Trump of E. J. Antoni as head of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has provoked widespread concern that vital data on jobs and inflation, which form the basis for countless decisions in the American and global economy, will no longer be reliable.

The appointment, announced earlier this week, came after Trump sacked BLS head Erika McEntarfer following a BLS jobs report at the beginning of the month. It showed a slowing of the US labour market, with the previous estimate of the number of jobs created in May and June revised down by 258,000.

Without providing any evidence, Trump declared the numbers had been "rigged" to make him and the Republican Party look bad.

The elevation of Antoni to what is supposedly a non-partisan position in the administration is another significant step in Trump's efforts to establish a personalist regime.

In contrast to McEntarfer, who had 20 years of experience in the gathering and analysis of statistics at the US Census Bureau before taking the BLS post, Antoni has no background in this area. He has spent most of his working life as an economist in right-wing think tanks, most recently as chief economist at the Heritage Foundation. The Foundation authored the Project 2025 document that has formed the basis for much of Trump's second-term agenda.

The political character of Antoni was revealed in the lead up to the presidential election when, while promoting Trump and Project 2025, he posted video-podcasts of himself in front of the Nazi warship the Bismarck.

His academic qualifications have come under fire from a number of quarters, most of them on the right-wing side of politics.

Commenting on his record, Kyle Pomerleau, an economist at the American Enterprise Institute, told the *New York Times*: "He has either shown a complete misunderstanding of economic data and principles, or he's showing a willingness to treat his audience with contempt and mislead them."

However, academic qualifications for the job were not what Trump was seeking.

In a post on X, Dave Hebert, an economist at the right-wing American Institute for Economic Research, wrote of Antoni: "I've been on several programs with him at this point and have been impressed by two things: his inability to understand basic economics and the speed with which he's gone MAGA."

Hebert expressed the hope that Antoni's appointment would be blocked by the Senate when it comes up for conformation.

The opposition to Antoni from so-called conservative circles reflects a division in the American ruling class. Trump's agenda, in particular on tariffs, is being opposed on the basis that it repudiates the so-called "free market" principles that have been the mainstay of American capitalism for decades.

Trump had picked an economist from the Heritage Foundation to serve as the BLS chief in his first term. But as Philippa Dunne, a labour economist at TLR Analytics, commented to the *Financial Times*, while there was some concern, it was nothing like the present: "I mean people are really upset."

Then outlining what lies at the base of that concern, she continued: "It's that the rest of the world is not going to trust our data. And if they don't trust us, they are not going to lend us money."

The quality of Antoni was pithily summed up by one critic who said that "no credible economist would take a job in which you get fired for publishing accurate data."

Some commentators have suggested that it does not really matter in the end that Antoni has no real qualifications for the job and has been appointed only because he is an ardent MAGA agenda proponent. This is because staff at the BLS will carry out the collection of data according to established methods and so the new chief will not be able to manipulate them.

But there are indications that the sacking of McEntarfer did not come out of the blue and was part of a broader plan.

This week, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that according

© World Socialist Web Site

to White House officials, “the Trump administration is considering changes to how the federal government collects and reports data.” There had been a series of “closed-door discussions in recent days” between White House aides and Labor Department officials over new options for data collection.

Trump is directly involved. White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said on Tuesday that he was looking at “means and methods” behind the jobs data. Trump has said both publicly and privately that jobs data is designed to hurt him politically, pointing in particular to the big downward revision in the May and June numbers.

The large-scale revisions which have occurred in the monthly jobs data are not the result of politically motivated manipulation, but the inherent difficulties of the process in which the initial data are based on returns delivered by respondents in a sample survey.

Over the past decade, the response rate to the establishment survey has fallen from 61 percent to 43 percent, with the response rate to the household survey down from 88 percent to 68 percent. This means that large revisions often must be made when more data become available.

These difficulties have been compounded by funding cuts. The BLS has had its budget reduced in real terms by 18 percent from 2009 to 2024 and is facing a further 8 percent cut this year.

Hailing his new appointment, Trump issued a social media post that declared: “Our economy is booming, and E.J. will ensure that the numbers released are honest and accurate. I know E.J. Antoni will do an incredible job in this new role.”

But Trump’s claims of a “booming” economy are based solely on the rise of the stock market to record highs. The data on the real underlying economy tell a very different story, one that threatens to blow apart his election promises of rising wages and living standards and lead to deepening opposition in the working class.

The most recent GDP data show that the US economy grew by only 1.2 percent for the first six months of this year compared to 2.5 percent for the same period last year.

An article by *Financial Times* columnist Tej Parikh published last month, before the downward revision in jobs market, was headlined, “The US economy is more fragile than it appears.” It noted that two thirds of new jobs had come from what he called the “less dynamic” sectors including health, government and education.

He noted that in June a BLS index for the private sector fell below 50, “signifying that more sectors are shedding jobs than gaining them. This is a rarity outside of a recession.”

He cited research which suggested that “the US labour market is close to the point where any further fall in demand could push up the unemployment rate significantly.”

He warned that “beneath the headlines … the US economy is like a frog in boiling water. The jobs, housing and retail markets are decelerating, and are close to a turning point.” Unless there was a reversal of the Trump tariff hikes, “it is hard to see what prevents this house of cards from crashing down.”

Something of the frenzied atmosphere in the Trump administration, which led to the BLS sacking decision and now the appointment of Antoni, is exemplified in another arena—tariffs.

The tariffs imposed on individual countries were based on the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, which gave the president power to impose tariffs in a “national emergency.” After a lower trade court ruled in May that Trump had overstepped his authority in imposing tariffs, as there was no such state of affairs, the administration took the case to a federal appeals court which put a stay on the ruling while it heard the appeal.

Consequently, the tariffs have gone into effect. But initial oral arguments on the appeal did not appear to go well for the government, prompting a deranged social media post from Trump, declaring:

“If a Radical Left Court ruled against us at this late date, in an attempt to bring down or disturb the largest amount of money, wealth creation and influence the USA has ever seen, it would be impossible to ever recover, or pay back, these massive sums of money and honor. It would be 1929 all over again, a GREAT DEPRESSION.”

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site