

US unions deepen ties to Trump administration

By Jerry White
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The American trade union bureaucracy spent much of this week praising Donald Trump and bolstering the billionaire president's claim that he is a champion of American workers.

Trump, who has outlined a program of savage austerity, a war on both immigrant and native-born workers, and unrestrained militarism, was given a rousing welcome at the North America Building Trades Unions National Legislative Conference at the Washington Hilton on Tuesday. Just two miles away at the National Press Club, Richard Trumka, the head of the AFL-CIO labor federation, also had warm words for Trump.

"I promise you that America's labor leaders will always find an open door with Donald Trump," Trump told the union conference, before launching into his standard rant against foreign countries and workers who had supposedly "stolen America's wealth" and left US workers impoverished through unfair trade deals. The bureaucrats applauded approvingly as Trump pledged to lift environmental regulations on employers and pointed to his record of restarting the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines. They cheered as he said his administration was cracking down on "illegal immigration" and preparing to end "visa abuses that undermine the American worker."

In his remarks at the National Press Club, AFL-CIO President Trumka—who has been a frequent visitor to the White House—praised Trump for pulling out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact and redrafting the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Mexico and Canada. He complained, however, that Trump had left the "most oppressive pieces in NAFTA" in place and failed to assure the unions that dues-paying members would be employed in federally funded infrastructure projects while cutting regulations and programs the unions backed.

The AFL-CIO chief urged the new administration of

billionaires, generals and fascists not to succumb to the corrupting influence of big money. "We are closing in on the first 100 days of President Trump's administration, and two very different factions have emerged," Trumka claimed. "There is a Wall Street wing that undermines Donald Trump's promises to workers, and a competing wing that could win the progress working people need.

"President Trump needs to decide who he stands with. The coal miners, farmers, steelworkers and other regular Americans who he promised to help in the campaign, or the Wall Street tycoons who are rigging the economy at our expense. This decision will be the single greatest test of his presidency," Trumka declared.

Like the rest of the union bureaucracy, Trumka is backward and ignorant, but this long-time stooge of big business is not entirely a fool. He knows Trump's anti-working class program will, sooner than later, provoke immense working-class opposition, including from thousands of workers in the Midwest Rust Belt states who voted for Trump out of desperation and disgust with Obama, Clinton and the Democrats.

In so far as he is advising Trump to follow the supposedly "anti-Wall Street wing" of his administration, he means checking the most fanatical anti-union elements in the Republican Party so the White House can more aggressively enlist the unions to suppress the class struggle and spread nationalist poison to disorient and divide workers.

"[I]t is not enough simply to demand companies stay in America if the jobs saved provide low wages and little voice," the AFL-CIO head commented. "President Trump should use his office and influence to call for an end to workplace intimidation, reject 'right to work' once and for all and promote and protect the freedom of every single worker to form or join a union and bargain for a better life."

Trumka also urged Congress to pass, and the president

to sign, the Miners Protection Act to shore up the United Mine Workers' multibillion-dollar health and retirement funds before the April 30 expiration of health care benefits for more than 22,000 retirees and surviving spouses.

There is no "anti-Wall Street" faction in the Trump administration or in the Republican and Democratic parties. Trumka and other union officials, however, do have a natural affinity for Trump's top aide and former *Breitbart News* editor, Stephen Bannon. After studying various Italian and French fascist ideologues, Bannon, a former Goldman Sachs investor, concluded that a little "anti-Wall Street" rhetoric could be added to racist and xenophobic agitation to build a future fascist movement in America.

Steeped in anti-communism and nationalism for decades, the American trade union bureaucracy has long been an incubator for semi-fascist and fascist tendencies. As early as the 1980s, under conditions of declining world position of American industry and the globalization of capitalist production, the unions adopted the corporatist outlook of labor-management-government collusion and the subordination of the working class to the "national interest." These views brought the US unions strikingly close to the labor syndicates in Mussolini's fascist Italy and the Peronist unions in Argentina.

The denial that workers had independent and antagonistic class interests in relation to their capitalist exploiters meant sacrificing everything to boost the profits and competitive position of American capitalism. This opened the floodgates to the four-decade-long destruction of jobs and living standards, under Democrats and Republicans alike, which has made the US the most unequal advanced country in the world.

The unions long ago ceased to be genuine workers' organizations. Instead they function as direct tools of corporate management and the government. While they have traditionally subordinated the working class to the domestic and foreign policy needs of the ruling class through the vehicle of the Democrats, they see in Trump and Bannon kindred spirits who embrace their program of "Buy American, hire American" to divert social opposition outward.

What drives these reactionary forces together is their mutual fear of the growing anti-capitalist and anti-war sentiment in the working class. Trumka made this clear during his remarks at National Press Club.

"As I close, I want to mention a recent study from Harvard. It showed that only 30 percent of those born

since the 1980s believe it's essential to live in a democratic nation. This is a startling statistic. I believe it reflects the simple truth that young people are bearing the brunt of our economic imbalance. The American idea that anything is possible if you work hard and play by the rules, has been fading away for this generation and too many others."

Trumka's concerns are not about the danger of fascism, something large sections of the labor apparatus would openly welcome or adapt to. The union chief's primary concern is that capitalist "democracy" has become discredited. Because of this, millions of workers and young people will seek more radical solutions.

Pointing to the fact that more than half of eligible voters already refuse to go to the polls, "knowing no matter which party wins, they will lose," Trumka asked, what will happen when the majority no longer believe in the current system?

The "only way to reverse that," he said, was by "rewriting the rules of the economy" to make it work for the majority. If workers "see no way to reverse those rules," Trumka warned, "they will find a way, they will find a way."

The only rules the Trump administration will rewrite are more than a century of reforms so the corporations can be freed from virtually all restrictions on the exploitation of the working class. This will drive ever more workers and young people to conclude that they must carry out the revolutionary struggle to replace the dictatorship of the super-rich and capitalism with a workers' government, genuine democracy and socialism. The AFL-CIO and Trumka are no less opposed to this than Trump and the entire US political establishment.

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