

Trump pushes reactionary “Buy American, Hire American” plan

By Jerry White
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President Trump signed an executive order Tuesday making it more difficult for skilled workers from other countries to obtain temporary work visas in the US. The order also called for a review of trade deals to enforce “Buy American” clauses and mandated government agencies to use American-made steel and other goods in federally funded projects and contracts.

The measures, Trump said, were part of his “Buy American, Hire American” policy, which would “send a powerful signal to the world: We’re going to defend our workers, protect our jobs, and finally put America first.”

Trump’s program of economic nationalism, along with his savage witch-hunting of immigrant workers, is the domestic counterpart to the administration’s ever more violent military provocations around the world. With the support of the trade union bureaucracy, Trump is peddling the lie that foreign workers and “unfair trade deals” with China, Mexico and other countries, not the relentless pursuit of profit by the American ruling class, are the causes for chronic unemployment and stagnant wages.

Aware that American workers are already tired of endless wars and their financial and human cost, the Trump administration is trying to divert social anger outward even as its program of expanding militarism, corporate tax cuts, deregulation and social spending cuts imposes greater hardships and inevitably provokes working-class opposition.

Trump signed the executive order at the headquarters of the Snap-On tool manufacturing company in Kenosha, Wisconsin, a former industrial town south of Milwaukee, which has been gutted by decades of auto factory closures and deindustrialization.

Reviving his now tired routine posturing as the savior of American workers, the billionaire president began his remarks by declaring, “I love workers.” His entourage was filled with others who share such “love,” including

Wisconsin’s Governor Scott Walker, who threatened to dispatch the national guard to crush mass worker protests in 2011, former Goldman Sachs executive and now Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, and billionaire Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, who is committed to destroying public education. Also joining Trump were his neo-fascistic aides Stephen Bannon and Stephen Miller who, no doubt, penned most of the president’s pseudo-populist remarks.

“For too long, we’ve watched as our factories have been closed and our jobs have been sent to other faraway lands,” Trump declared. “We’ve lost 70,000 factories since China joined the World Trade Organization... But this election, the American people voted to end the theft of American prosperity. They voted to bring back their jobs—and to bring back their dreams into our country.”

Trump lashed out at the NATO countries for not paying for US military protection and then singled out Canada for criticism, saying the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was threatening the businesses of Wisconsin dairy farmers. “We’re going to stand up for our farmers,” Trump said, because in “Canada, some very unfair things have happened to our dairy farmers... It’s another typical one-sided deal against the United States. And it’s not going to be happening for long.”

In a reference to his plans to free corporate America from whatever occupational safety, health and environmental rules still exist, Trump intoned, “when it comes to wasteful, destructive, job-killing regulations, we are going to use a tool you all know very well—it’s called the sledgehammer.”

The president claimed the federal government’s “Buy American” standards have “been gutted by excessive waivers and reckless exemptions,” adding that “countless jobs and countless contracts...have been lost to cheap, subsidized, and low-quality foreign goods.” Every federal agency would now be ordered to “strictly uphold the

rules,” and he pledged to “crack down on foreign bidders that used dumped steel and other subsidized goods to take contracts from workers like you... Not going to happen anymore.”

The administration’s “Hire American rules,” he said, would mandate that “jobs must be offered to American workers first.” He claimed, “widespread abuse in our immigration system is allowing American workers of all backgrounds to be replaced by workers brought in from other countries to fill the same job for sometimes less pay.” He said, “American workers have long called for reforms to end these visa abuses. And today, their calls are being answered for the first time.” The “long-overdue reform of H1B visas,” he said, would restrict them to “the most-skilled and highest-paid applicants, and they should never, ever be used to replace Americans.”

The accusation that the temporary visa program is responsible for wholesale joblessness and falling wages is a fraud. The program, first enacted in 1990, provides three-year visas to only 85,000 skilled and college-educated workers per year, mostly to computer programmers and other high-tech employees, along with a smaller number of doctors, medical trainees, public school and college instructors, engineers, entertainers and lawyers.

Silicon Valley employers like Google, Apple, Intel and outsourcing firms, which hold the visas and determine whether to renew them for another three years or sponsor a worker for a green card (permanent residence), certainly hold enormous leverage and can exploit these workers to the fullest. This is the result of the workings of the capitalist profit system, not the fault of the victims of this exploitation. In any case, Trump’s measures will only serve to intimidate and silence workers who fear their temporary visas will be cancelled.

As for Trump’s claim that “American workers have long called for reforms to end these visa abuses,” this only refers to the AFL-CIO and other trade unions, which have campaigned against H-1B visas as part of their general efforts to divide the working class along national lines and block any common struggle against the global capitalist corporations.

Nor have “Buy American” campaigns, long peddled by the unions, been anything but a ruse to tie workers to their “own” employers and force them accept the destruction of jobs, wages and living standards in the name of making US corporation more competitive, i.e., profitable.

Under condition of growing working-class hostility to Trump, the trade unions have become one of the

president’s most dependable allies. Far from denouncing the mass roundups and deportation of immigrant workers, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, a frequent visitor to the White House, offered to work with Trump to “rewrite the rules” on trade and immigration.

After the president’s rant against immigrants before a joint session of Congress on February 28, Trumka told Fox News, “I was actually pleasantly surprised to hear him say the system is broken and its legal immigration, as well as undocumented people—he talked about them a lot—but this was the first time he spoke about legal immigration being used to drive down wages. We’ve been saying that for a long time.”

In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* last month, Trumka expressed hope that the president would soon name China a “currency manipulator,” renegotiate NAFTA and impose “steep tariffs on China and Mexico, as previously promised.” That he had failed to do so already, Trumka lamented, was because of the influence of the “Wall Street wing” in the White House.

“Arrayed on the other side of the White House fight, Mr. Trumka said, are Peter Navarro, an economist who wants to confront China and runs the White House’s small National Trade Council, and the White House’s chief strategist, Steve Bannon, who views himself as an antiglobalist,” the leading business newspaper reported.

The AFL-CIO, which has long been a petri dish for ultranationalist and fascistic views, has found a meeting of the minds with Trump and Bannon. But after decades of betraying the working class and colluding with the bosses in the destruction of entire cities like Kenosha, the unions lack any credibility among broad sections of workers and young people. They are clutching on to Trump, and he onto them, to prevent American workers from concluding that they must oppose economic nationalism and join with their class brothers and sisters internationally to abolish capitalism and its scourges of poverty, inequality and war.

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