

As Attack on Jobs Escalates, AFL-CIO Chief Pledges to “Partner” with Trump Administration

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Friday was the last day of work for 1,300 General Motors hourly employees at the GM Detroit-Hamtramck assembly plant. Less than a year after being hired and promised full-time positions by GM and union officials, the workers are out of a job. Medical insurance is running out at the end of the month, and there are few prospects for decent jobs in a city where 117,000 workers are unemployed.

The job cuts in Detroit provide a far more realistic picture of the US economy than soaring stock markets or the Fed officials’ fantasies about “full employment.” Yet the layoff of 1,300 workers was not even deemed newsworthy by the local media. It also did not rate a mention by President Trump, who has appointed GM’s CEO to his corporate advisory board.

The Detroit job cuts follow more than 2,000 GM layoffs in Lansing, Michigan, and Lordstown, Ohio in January. They anticipate a far greater onslaught as US corporations restructure in response to the global economic slowdown and increasing international competition.

In the US, automakers are cutting production due to a growing glut of unsold cars. Commercial aircraft manufacturer Boeing, which cut eight percent of its workforce last year, announced Friday that 1,880 workers had accepted voluntary retirements. The company said more job cuts are expected in 2017 amid falling orders and tight competition with European-based Airbus, which announced 1,200 job cuts a few months ago. A new layoff announcement is made virtually every day in the retail, banking and technology sectors.

These are part of an international process. On Wednesday, China’s labor minister, Yin Weimin, said the country will cut another 500,000 steel and coal jobs this year. Last year, 726,000 workers lost their jobs in the coal and steel industries, or 40 percent of the 1.8 million jobs the government said would be eliminated in those industries as part of a massive restructuring of state enterprises.

In addition to the job cuts, corporations are seeking to transform their workforces into largely casual, temporary laborers, hired and fired at will, like the Detroit-Hamtramck GM workers.

According to the Government Accountability Office, contingent workers now comprise 40.4 percent of all employees. Under Obama, 95 percent of all new jobs created in the US since the so-called economic recovery began have been part-time and temporary. In the European Union, more than half of all new jobs since 2010 have been through temporary contracts.

The corporations are also accelerating their plans to dump their pensions and retiree health care obligations and continue to shift the cost of medical coverage on to workers. This

month, 22,600 retired coal miners or their widows were notified that they will be losing health care benefits on April 30, when funding for their insurance plans expire. More than one million working or retired Americans are currently covered by pension plans that are in imminent danger of insolvency, according to the Pension Rights Center.

The Trump administration, packed with billionaires, is planning to slash corporate taxes and eliminate workplace safety, environmental and labor regulations. In his address to the joint session of Congress on Tuesday, Trump declared that his government has “undertaken a historic effort to massively reduce job crushing regulations.” The increase in military spending outlined in his new budget will be paid for by slashing food stamps and other essential programs, while the ultra-reactionaries appointed to key agencies set their sights on the privatization of public education and the elimination of Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

As Wall Street is celebrating the Trump administration’s plans for a massive handout to the corporations and banks, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka has pledged that his corporatist and anti-working class organization is “absolutely” committed to partnering with Trump.

Trump’s fascistic rants against immigrant workers and endless claims that foreign countries and foreign workers are destroying jobs and lowering wages is a calculated effort, aided and abetted by the unions, to divide the working class and block a unified response to the escalation of the class war policies at home and ever greater imperialist militarism abroad.

Responding to the speech, Trumka, the president of the AFL-CIO labor federation, told Fox News that the unions were prepared for Trump to “rewrite the rules of the economy,” particularly on trade and immigration policy.

Trump’s speech was the president’s “finest moment,” the union head said, signaling that “he’s about to start doing business rather than playing for the camera—that was a good sign.” Far from condemning the president’s xenophobic and racist slanders against immigrants, the AFL-CIO head signaled his support for an even more brutal immigration policy, including against legal residents.

“I was actually pleasantly surprised,” Trumka said, “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.”

Trumka said that workers voted for the president because “they wanted him to rewrite the rules of the economy—not for the rich, not for the wealthy, not for corporate America, not for Wall Street but for them—and so he’s been a mixed bag on that.” The unions would tout the good things he did and criticize the bad, Trumka said, echoing the lie that trade wars and mass deportation were good for American workers.

“Will we partner with him? Absolutely,” Trumka said. “Will we partner with him to try to rewrite the immigration rules of the country? Absolutely... Using the bully pulpit to say this is your country, this is where you owe your allegiance, this is where you should be investing and building, that is a good thing.”

The trade unions have been a chief conduit for spreading nationalist poison among workers for a very long time. In the early 1980s, as American capitalism fell into decline and its

corporations confronted international competitors, the unions promoted economic nationalism to justify their integration into the structure of corporate management and collusion in the destruction of the jobs and living standards of the workers they claimed to represent.

While the unions have worked closely with the Democrats in overseeing the attack on jobs and wages for decades, they now see income opportunities in Trump's efforts to entice corporations to "Buy American, Hire American." This has nothing to do with the interests of workers. Rather, the union executives want to restore their lost income through the influx of new dues-paying members, regardless of whether they are earning poverty wages.

The unions are not "workers' organizations," but labor-management syndicates that are hostile to the interests of the working class. New organizations of struggle, including rank-and-file factory and workplace committees, democratically controlled by workers and committed to the methods of the class struggle, must be built to resist the coming attacks on jobs, living standards, essential social services and all the basic social rights of the working class.

Above all, workers must reject economic nationalism. Workers in every country face the same struggles and confront the same enemy: the global capitalist system, which enriches a handful of billionaires at the expense of the broad masses of working people whose collective labor creates society's riches.

To unite the working class—black, white, native-born and immigrant, in the US and around the world—workers must build a political movement, independent of both capitalist parties, the Democrats and Republicans, to fight for international socialism and against the danger of world war.

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