

Trump and Musk's anti-worker agenda

written by Gary Wilson
November 9, 2024



A march of Amazon workers and their allies in New York City.

Donald Trump is a fascist and must be fought by any means necessary.

Trump's brand of fascism is rooted in the Confederacy and the slave-owning system, the overturn of Reconstruction, and the terror of the Ku Klux Klan.

Bigotry, racism, sexism, and anti-LGBTQ+ extremism are part of this fascism's weaponry.

It's incredibly anti-worker (don't be confused by any campaign demagoguery). During a live conversation on X with Elon Musk in August, Donald Trump said that striking workers should be fired. Billionaire Musk, a key player in the Trump campaign whose racism is rooted in his apartheid South African origin, said on Oct. 30, just days before the vote, that under Trump, workers should be prepared for "[economic hardship](#)," that cuts are coming.

Trump has promised to appoint Musk as chief government efficiency officer. That means that Musk's talk of economic hardship — he's already made painful cuts and waged anti-union warfare at his own companies — should be believed.

Trump's fascist rallying cry is Make America Great Again — MAGA. Most take this as a reference to the post-World War II period in the U.S.

The U.S. empire

After World War II, U.S. capitalism emerged as the world's dominant imperialist power. While Europe and Japan were devastated by the war, the mainland of the U.S. remained untouched.

Unlike war-ravaged Europe and Japan, the United States' industrial capacity was intact and had even grown due to wartime production. Germany was disabled to the

point where its industrial output reverted to levels seen in 1890. Meanwhile, U.S. industry surged forward.

U.S. imperialism was triumphant, and the rival imperialist powers were put on a leash but not eliminated. The list of imperialist capitalist powers hasn't changed much since World War I. The United States is the dominant imperialist power, with Britain, Germany, France, and Japan as satellite imperialists. They comprise the Group of Five, now known as the G7, including Canada and Italy. After the Second World War, many colonies became independent while remaining economically exploited as neocolonies.

In the U.S., after World War II, a military-industrial complex emerged that dominated the economy (President Dwight D. Eisenhower, an Army 5-star general, named it). Wartime research and development led to significant technological development, which was applied to peacetime manufacturing. Consumers had deferred purchases during the war, creating a surge in demand for goods afterward.

At an economic conference in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, the U.S. established a world monetary system dominated by the U.S. empire. The U.S. dollar became the world's reserve currency. Bretton Woods also established the IMF and World Bank as a means of U.S. influence, dominating the economies of almost every country.

1945-46 massive strike wave

Following World War II, there was a massive wave of strikes across the U.S. in 1945-1946, which secured better wages, working conditions, and benefits — such as pensions and health insurance.

Communist-led workers' movements swept every imperialist country. The communist parties in France, Italy, Spain, Greece, and Portugal were widely

popular.

The United States responded with NATO, the U.S.-commanded military alliance aimed at the Soviet Union and its new Eastern European allies, and to put down any revolutionary movements in Western Europe.

The U.S. also launched the Marshall Plan, which put \$20 billion into Europe (in today's dollars, about \$220 billion to \$230 billion) and made similar economic assistance to Japan, meant to smother the rising revolutionary struggles. Germany and Japan rose again as imperialist economic powers but without military industries or major armies, as required by U.S. treaties. Both are occupied by the U.S. military, with the most significant U.S. military bases outside the U.S. itself. The absence of costly military industries and armies actually boosted their economic growth.

In Western Europe and Japan, workers — mostly socialists and communists — fought for and won benefits greater than anything achieved in the U.S., such as medical care, sick leave, vacation time, retirement, public transportation, and much more.

In response to the post-war strike wave and the rising popularity of socialism in the U.S. and around the world, an anti-communist witch hunt was launched in the U.S. Communists and socialists who had been the backbone of the labor unions were forced out of the unions, attacked, and some imprisoned. The unions were severely weakened, never to recover the strength they had shown, though their gains were not cut back until the 1970s.

Opportunists in the union leadership

The witch hunt was used to put opportunists into the union leadership who would collaborate with the bosses. Working-class solidarity was stifled, while a sense of entitlement and privilege was promoted.

As Lenin noted, the superprofits of imperialist plunder made it “possible to bribe the

labor leaders and the upper stratum of the labor aristocracy. And that is just what the capitalists of the ‘advanced’ countries are doing: they are bribing them in a thousand different ways, direct and indirect, overt and covert.”

According to official government statistics, the all-time peak employment of workers engaged in manufacturing in the United States was in 1979. That’s when the cuts seriously began.

1979 recession was pivotal

The year 1979 was the start of a recession that was a pivotal moment in the history of U.S. capitalism — possibly even more significant than 1929.

The recession from 1979 to 1982 was anything but ordinary, not merely due to its intensity but because of the lasting changes that followed its conclusion.

Beginning in August 1979, the long-term rise in manufacturing jobs that had characterized U.S. industrial capitalism began to reverse, leading to a sustained decline. By the time the Great Recession hit in 2008-09, U.S. manufacturing employment had fallen to 11.5 million, the lowest figure since 1941, which marked the shift from the Great Depression to the wartime economy of World War II.

Across the U.S., whole industrial districts were ravaged. Cities such as Buffalo, Pittsburgh, and Cleveland, which were mighty centers of heavy industry, were cut down, and the great steel mills and factories that had dominated the world’s markets were shuttered. The other great industrial center, Detroit, Michigan, the unionized hub of the U.S. automobile industry, was devastated.

Gone with the old factories and mills are millions of well-paying union jobs.

But it’s not just old industries like steel and auto. In Silicon Valley, California, the factories — or fabs as they are called — that produced computer chips and those

that assembled computers are mostly gone.

U.S. manufacturing jobs have been decimated. Once a source of stable, well-paying jobs (32% of the workforce in 1945-46), manufacturing now accounts for only 8% of all U.S. employment.

Union membership fell from 34% to 10%

This has pushed U.S. workers into lower-paying service jobs (many offering only part-time hours), reshaping the U.S. workforce. Union membership fell from 34% in the 1950s to around 10% in 2023, mostly in public-sector government jobs, with only 6% in private-sector jobs.

Today, living standards are on the biggest decline since the 1930s, driven by the acute rise in prices of consumer goods and services. Prices are 20%+ higher than they were pre-pandemic. Labor conditions are deteriorating, with more part-time and lower-paying government jobs, an increase in second jobs, and little full-time job growth. Health care, education, and many social programs have been cut or eliminated. Food prices are soaring, and housing has become almost unaffordable. In April 2024, CNBC reported that 65% of the workforce lives paycheck to paycheck; wages barely cover essential expenses, such as rent, groceries, utilities, and transportation.

U.S. capitalism in decline

U.S. capitalism has been in decline for decades. The economy has increasingly shifted into unproductive military production, that is, production for destruction, not consumption.

In 2016, Donald Trump's first presidential run, the election centered on the years of economic decline. Donald Trump promised to revive economic prosperity while prioritizing "America First." He presented himself as an "outsider" challenging the

Washington establishment and to “Make America Great Again,” referring to the post World War II 1950s era.

At the time, Bernie Sanders was winning the Democratic Party primaries, talking about socialism and channeling working-class anger over economic austerity. The party machine blocked Sanders and put in Wall Street favorite Hillary Clinton.

Trump picked up Bernie Sanders’ anti-corporate message. He told [Yale Business School Professor Jeffrey Sonnenfeld](#) that he copied Bernie Sanders’s campaign because it was so effective. But Trump’s message played on despair and criminalized the victims, the poorest and oppressed; he whipped up racist hatred of immigrants and was wildly venomous against trans people.

So much of what Trump says is racist fantasy. His attacks on immigrants are all lies.

Immigrants not taking away jobs, housing

Immigrants aren’t taking away jobs and housing. In fact, it’s just the opposite — immigrants expand jobs and housing.

A key factor for U.S. economic growth is immigration, which boosts the labor force, consumer spending, and tax revenues. The U.S. population grew by 0.9% in 2023, primarily through immigration. Capitalist profits come from labor and require an expanding workforce to grow.

Without sustained immigration, U.S. economic growth would fall because of the slowing workforce growth.

Immigrants comprise 18.6% of the U.S. labor force as of 2023 and are crucial in various industries, including construction, health care, retail, and leisure, which face high labor demand. Legal immigrants form most of the foreign-born population, contrary to frequent rants about “illegal” immigration. Immigration is not the cause

of declining wages.

Trump's anti-immigrant rants are meant to whip up racism and are a diversion from the real cause of the loss of jobs and housing — the capitalist profit system.

Trump's policies won't stop U.S. capitalism's decline. But their purpose is to enforce austerity while diverting working-class anger away from the capitalist ruling class.

They won't succeed, however. The opposition is already there. Around 40% of those registered to vote did not do so. Although Trump got 51% of those who voted, he actually got only 28% support of people of voting age. Three out of four in the U.S. did not vote for Trump. There was no overwhelming mandate for Trump or his policies.

This opposition can be mobilized into action to put a stop to the racist attacks, the anti-trans assaults, the sexism, and violations of women's right to make their own choices, the union-busting and economic hardship.

