



Trumpist right targets the unions

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Think-tanks in the USA are working hard to sketch policies and prepare personnel for a 2025-9 Trump administration. Some have alarming proposals about replacing unions by "non-adversarial" worker organisation.

Trump's term in 2017-21 was chaotic. Although Trump rallied much of the right-wing Republican base brewed up over decades in churches, gun clubs, and local Republican organisations, most top-level political operatives of the US right didn't trust Trump and didn't expect him to win the 2016 election.

Trump had no coherent and consistent team to translate his demagogy into detail policies and push them through the USA's ramshackle and high-inertia machinery of government.

After the 6 January 2021 storming of the Capitol, it seemed at first that the top-level operatives of the US right would write off Trump as an embarrassment. In fact Trump has re-hegemonised the Republican party, including more of its top-level operatives.

The free-marketer American Enterprise Institute and Cato Institute keep their distance from Trump. The Heritage Foundation is closer. The America First Policy Institute of Brooke Rollins, and American Compass, led by Oren Cass, play a bigger role.

AFPI is the more Trump-aligned, and has a section on its website offering "Biblical Foundations" for its policy schemes. Its "pro-worker" pretence is largely based on claims that deregulation boosts jobs. Cass, previously an adviser to anti-Trump Republican Mitt Romney, has veered pro-Trump, has former Trump officials in his team, and offers more detail.

American Compass, emphasising the limits of free markets, offers detailed proposals for "new forms of worker organisations that might provide benefits, work collaboratively with management, and bargain industry-wide for baseline employment conditions".

It proposes "non-union worker-management committees" in workplaces, "workplace committees (sometimes employer-funded) where employee representatives are empowered to discuss issues of common concern with management, in a posture [not] adversarial". It advocates broader worker organisations whose main function is distribution of government-funded benefits: "the United States should establish parameters for creation, governance, and composition of worker benefit organisations and make them eligible to receive government funds for administration of public programs".

Its report does not say explicitly that currently-existing unions should be suppressed, only that they should be barred from political action. It claims, however, that "most workers say they would prefer a worker organisation jointly run by workers and management" and suggests "an alternative form of apolitical union that workers would likely prefer" [to the existing unions].

All this is presented as a pro-worker push, in a style similar to that of far-right movements of the 1920s and 30s which claimed that their organisation of forced class collaboration was more advantageous to workers than the existing "too political" unions.

The US right does not worry at present about the risk of the working class taking political power soon, as the far right in Europe worried in the 1920s and 30s. It demonises "Big Ed" (the universities), "Big Government", seen as drivers of liberal or progressive ideology and of government regulations hindering business, and "the union leader who praises abortion access or job-squeezing environmental mandates [or is] routing dues to progressive war chests".

But the threat to workers' freedom to organise their own unions and deploy union strength for social and political causes is serious.