

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article4854>



USA

Trump Makes Early Enemies

- IV Online magazine - 2017 - IV505 - February 2017 PDF -

Publication date: Friday 3 February 2017

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President Donald Trump and his alt-right advisor Stephen Bannon—“President Bannon” as he is being called—are making enemies fast, and lots of them. Leaders of some of the country’s largest corporations have come out against Trump’s Muslim and refugee ban. Some Christians, including Evangelicals, object to the ban’s privileging of Christians. Trump’s statement on the holocaust, which failed to mention Jews, offended major Jewish groups. Workers, workers' centers, and labor unions, which represent many immigrants, have also spoken out against the Muslim ban.

These controversies and conflicts, especially the major capitalists who are breaking with Trump on this issue, are very significant. The problems that Trump faces are a reflection of conflicts among elites over the U.S. role in the global economy. American corporations have become globalized in a variety of ways. First, they have operations around the world that involve deploying executives and other employees to many different countries for long term stays or short visits. Consequently, restrictions on travel represent a serious problem for such companies.

Thousands demonstrated at airports across the country, including New York's JFK airport.

Second, the massive global migrations of the last 40 years have provided many corporations with immigrant employees from virtually every nation on earth, employees who are executives, technicians, and workers. These may be people on their way to citizenship, Green Card workers with permanent residency, workers on specific visas, or undocumented workers. Restrictions on employees in all of these categories also represent a threat to modern multinational corporations. Most important, modern corporations operate with global production chains, with parts made in one country, products assembled in another, and then perhaps sold in yet another. Trump’s policies threaten to throw a monkey wrench into the machinery of world production both by inhibiting international population movements and by altering agreements like NAFTA that allow for the free expansion of supply chains across borders.

Trump’s white nationalist economic and political program appears to want to rip the United States out of these complicated relationships, and that will be bad for many businesses, which is one of the sources of this initial friction between the administration and the corporate world. Trump is also, of course, trying to influence corporate decisions about where to invest and where to build new plants, demanding that manufacturing jobs remain in or return to the United States. From the point of view of corporate boards, this is an intrusion into their business and their right to make a profit. Yet, at the same time, he is promising to reduce government regulation of all sorts—including labor and the environment—and to cut taxes. Business of course loves these concessions, and they will likely limit outright opposition to the administration, at least as long as there are still doubts about how far Trump’s nationalist and protectionist program will be taken.

Yet, the present controversies and conflicts are not only about the material issues of the business world. The “white” part of the white nationalist program makes categorical opponents of Muslims and Jews, as well as Asians, Latinos and, of course, Blacks. Trump’s and Bannon’s white nationalist ideology also represents a profound break with American’s historic ruling class ideology of democracy, pluralism, and more recently of diversity and inclusion. The ideological rupture that is taking place, exacerbated by Trump, also represents a major development that gives rise to splits from the top to the bottom of American society.

While the United States has a long history of racism and pockets of society that subscribe to rightwing racist ideas, most Americans do not hold the alt-right, white nationalist ideology, and converting many of them to it will take some time. Others, of course, will never accept it. Meanwhile the struggle between traditional liberalism, contemporary neoliberalism, and white nationalism will continue to cause conflict.

The CEOs Rebel

Several corporate CEOs spoke out against Trump's Muslim and refugee ban. Mark Fields of Ford stated, "Core to our values are respect for people. And all of our policies, including our human-resource policies, support a diverse and inclusive workplace, and we don't support policies that are counter to our values."

Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook said,

"My great grandparents came from Germany, Austria and Poland. Priscilla's parents were refugees from China and Vietnam. The United States is a nation of immigrants, and we should be proud of that. Like many of you, I'm concerned about the impact of the recent executive orders signed by President Trump. We need to keep this country safe, but we should do that by focusing on people who actually pose a threat."

Goldman Sachs CEO Lloyd Blankfein, CEO of Goldman Sachs, which has provided Trump with several cabinet members and top advisors, told employees, "This is not a policy we support, and I would note that it has already been challenged in federal court." Blankfein was a Hillary Clinton supporter in the last election

Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz wrote to company partners and employees:

"I write to you today with deep concern, a heavy heart and a resolute promise. Let me begin with the news that is immediately in front of us: we have all been witness to the confusion, surprise and opposition to the Executive Order that President Trump issued on Friday, effectively banning people from several predominantly Muslim countries from entering the United States, including refugees fleeing wars. I can assure you that our Partner Resources team has been in direct contact with the partners who are impacted by this immigration ban, and we are doing everything possible to support and help them to navigate through this confusing period."

Schultz also expressed his support for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program that Trump has vowed to eliminate, and expressed Starbucks' commitment to hiring refugees.

CEOs of the tech companies, which both have operations around the world and employ many immigrants, spoke out especially strongly. Reed Hastings of Netflix wrote on Facebook:

"Trump's actions are hurting Netflix employees around the world, and are so un-American it pains us all. Worse, these actions will make America less safe (through hatred and loss of allies) rather than more safe. A very sad week, and more to come with the lives of over 600,000 Dreamers here in a America under imminent threat. It is time to link arms together to protect American values of freedom and opportunity."

At Google's headquarters in Mountain View, Calif., hundreds of employees demonstrated carrying signs reading, "Silicon Valley: Built by Immigrants." There were also protests at Google offices in New York, San Francisco, and Seattle with over 2,000 joining the protests in all the company's offices. Google employees welcomed company founder Sergey Brin to the protest with cheers. Brin, Google's co-founder, spoke to employees: "so many people were obviously outraged by this order, as am I myself, being an immigrant and a refugee," Brin told the crowd. "I'm glad to see the energy here today and around the world to know that people are fighting for what's right out there."

Tech companies went further than others, with Amazon and Expedia joining the State of Washington's federal lawsuit against the Trump administration because the new policy adversely affects their businesses.

Republican Leaders Criticize Trump

While most Republicans have enthusiastically endorsed Trump's policies since his election, some have remained silent, and a few leading Republican politicians have spoken out against Trump's executive order. Republican Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham and some eighteen other Congressmen criticized Trump's Muslim ban either in principle or for particular aspects of it, such as the detention of Green Card holders, or its crude implementation.

McCain and Graham issued a joint statement saying, "We fear this executive order will become a self-inflicted wound in the fight against terrorism. It may do more to help terrorist recruitment than improve our security."

Senate Foreign Relations Chairman Bob Corker told the media, "We all share a desire to protect the American people, but this executive order has been poorly implemented, especially with respect to green card holders. The administration should immediately make appropriate revisions, and it is my hope that following a thorough review and implementation of security enhancements that many of these programs will be improved and reinstated."

Christians and Jews Angry with Trump

Despite their reservations, most Evangelical Christian conservatives voted for Trump, but some now express differences. Several major Christian groups, especially those that work with migrants and refugees, took a strong stand against Trump's Muslim ban and especially the privileging of Christians. A series of religious leaders told the New York Times of their objections to the policy. Rev. Scott Arbeiter, president of World Relief, the National Association of Evangelicals' international aid group, told the NYT, "We oppose any religions test that would place the suffering of one people over another."

Bishop Joe S Vásquez of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement reading: "We need to protect all our brothers and sisters of all faiths, including Muslims, who have lost family, home and country." Sarah Krause, a senior director for refugee programs of the Church World Service, made up of mainstream Protestant churches, said that her group "denounces the prioritization of Christian refugees over Muslim refugees. We are called on by our faith to love the stranger. To do anything other than that is in violation of our Christian principles."

The president of the National Association of Evangelicals, which represents more than 45,000 churches, sent a letter to Trump and Vice-President Mike Pence stating that, "The U.S. refugee resettlement program's screening process is already extremely thorough. We believe that our nation can continue to be both compassionate and secure." The letter asked the president to resume the US refugee resettlement program "immediately."

Jewish groups expressed their incredulity and indignation at the Trump administration's omission of a mention of Jews in its holocaust remembrance statement. The Republican Jewish Coalition, which receives large contributions from casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, understated its view when it called the White House statement, "an unfortunate omission. History unambiguously shows the purpose of the Nazi's final solution was the extermination of the Jews of Europe."

Mort Klein of The Zionist Organization of America stated, "Especially as a child of Holocaust survivors, I and ZOA are compelled to express our chagrin and deep pain at President Trump, in his Holocaust Remembrance Day message, omitting any mention of anti-Semitism and the six million Jews who were targeted and murdered by the German Nazi regime."

Workers, Workers' Centers, and Labor Unions Protest Trump's Ban

While Trump has had success in winning over the conservative building trades unions, many other groups of workers, workers' centers, and labor unions have come out against Trump. On January 28, the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, a non-profit that represents 19,000 taxi drivers, called on its members to strike for one hour at the John F. Kennedy Airport against Trump's Muslim and refugee ban. Many taxi drivers are immigrants, a large number of them Muslims. The Alliance wrote, "We cannot be silent. We go to work to welcome people to a land that once welcomed us. We will not be divided." It added on Twitter, "Drivers stand in solidarity with thousands protesting inhumane & unconstitutional #MuslimBan."

The CUNY Professional Staff Congress (PSC), of which I am a member, is protesting the denial of entry to our sister Saira Rafiee, an Iranian graduate student who was visiting family in Iran last week when Trump's executive order took effect. The PSC is also providing her with legal assistance. A demonstration in support of her is planned for February 3. Barbara Bowen, PSC president stated, "I vow to fight for her. I join the students and faculty fighting for the simple right of someone who has legal status, who has been thoroughly vetted, who is on a visa, simply to rejoin her fellow students, faculty, staff and resume her studies. It is an outrage."

Trump's presidency has already created a variety of fissures in American society and internationally. The resistance movement will be working to exacerbate these until they become deep rifts between Trump and various elements of his political base.

February 1, 2017

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