

Dear President Trumka,

It was with great dismay that I read your statement on the Dakota Access Pipeline. As a teacher and a leader in a statewide union committed to a climate justice agenda that marries the fight against economic inequality to the struggle to address catastrophic climate change, I was shocked by your statement's embarrassingly inaccurate view of the climate crisis and deep insensitivity to the rights of indigenous peoples. In sum, your statement is factually inaccurate, morally suspect, politically inept and does not stand for the values that should guide a progressive union movement worth being a part of in an era of stark threats to the future of our children.

Your assertion that building new pipelines is part of a "comprehensive energy policy" that "addresses the threat of climate change" flies in the face of all the most recent climate science which tells us that we need start a managed decline of fossil fuel production immediately if we are to have any hope of avoiding the worst case scenarios for the planet. To advocate against this while citing your concern for climate change is an exercise in doublethink and a perfect example of the "new climate denial" which gives lip service to concerns about climate while refusing to acknowledge the economic and political changes that are necessary to combat it.

This, combined with your glib reference to the "sensitive situations" involving places of "significance to Native Americans" followed by a dismissal of indigenous rights in favor of "union members' livelihoods" that you claim are being "held hostage" by endless delays (aka the historic protest in defense of their rights), is a sad return to the bad old days when the racist thread in the American union movement endorsed segregated locals, exclusionary immigration policies, and all matter of other injustices as long as the business unionist wing of the movement was getting its piece of the pie.

Finally, your condemnation of activists seeking to drive policy by "attacking individual construction projects" seems to forget the long, proud tradition of direct action, sometimes illegal, that put the American labor movement on the map. Politically, this condemnation of the heroic action of our friends in the environmental movement turns those who should be our allies into potential enemies. It is counterproductive at best.

The sad thing about this unfortunate statement is that the necessary and dramatic transition to a sustainable economy has the potential to bring in millions of good, middle-class union jobs that would put the union movement on the right side of history and on the path to build the future. That would be the kind of leadership that would change everything in a positive fashion rather than cling to the failed business unionism of the past.

So it is with anger that I write this, but also with hope that you might, in the future, lead with vision rather than be led by the fearful, reactionary elements of the labor movement that at times sound more like Donald Trump than advocates for social justice.

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