

Biden holds first campaign rally in Pittsburgh-area union hall

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Former Vice President Joe Biden held the first public rally of his campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination Monday, using a Teamsters union hall in Duquesne, Pennsylvania, in the Pittsburgh area, to showcase his support from the union officialdom.

The rally came hours after the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) became the first union to make an official endorsement in the 2020 campaign, after remaining neutral in the 2016 contest between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. IAFF President Harold Schaitberger announced the Biden endorsement in a video. He stood behind Biden at the Monday afternoon rally.

Biden paid tribute to the IAFF, the Teamsters, the United Steelworkers, the Service Employees International Union, the Pennsylvania Federation of Teachers and the Pennsylvania Education Association, among other unions, in his opening remarks.

He bluntly explained the reason for holding his first campaign rally in the Pittsburgh area: it was Trump's wins in devastated and deindustrialized regions in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin and other states that accounted for his Electoral College victory in 2016, and the Democrats needed to win back those areas to defeat Trump in 2020.

While campaign aides and media commentators portrayed his embrace of the unions at a rally in a former steel town as an appeal for the support of blue-collar workers, the reality is that Biden was hailing organizations that are widely hated in the working class because of decades of sellouts and betrayals, in which millions of workers have seen their jobs, wages, benefits and pensions destroyed with the collusion of the unions.

For all his pretended persona as “middle class Joe,” which he put forward again during his stump speech,

Biden is well aware of the social gulf between these rotten organizations and the workers who are trapped in them, to say nothing of the millions more workers who have nothing to do with the unions at all.

He made a passing reference to the reorganization of the US auto industry under the Obama administration, in which he played a critical role as vice president, mentioning the “sacrifices” made by auto workers and the taxpayer bailout of General Motors. He then criticized GM for its recent announcement of more than 14,000 layoffs.

Those “sacrifices” included the destruction of far more than 14,000 jobs, the slashing of wages for new-hires by 50 percent, the creation of multiple tiers to divide auto workers in every factory, cuts in benefits, speed-up and plant closures. All of these attacks on workers were carried out with the full support of the United Auto Workers union, which pushed through contracts opposed by the rank and file while highly paid union officials were collecting massive bribes from the auto bosses.

Biden focused his attacks on Trump on his open incitement of ultra-right and racist forces, citing particularly Trump's comments after the 2017 Charlottesville, Virginia riot by neo-Nazis, when Trump notoriously said there were “very fine people on both sides” in the confrontation between fascists and antifascists. He pointed to the anti-Semitic massacre at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh six months ago and last week's attack by a fascist gunman in Poway, California.

But he made no reference to the issue of immigration, in regard to which the Tree of Life gunman used Trump's exact language, referring to refugees fleeing violence and poverty in Central America as “invaders” who had to be stopped.

Instead, Biden made repeated references to the need for national unity, preached the gospel of American greatness compared to all other countries, and ended his remarks with the appeal, “God bless our troops,” although there had been no previous reference to foreign policy or military operations in the 27-minute address.

One of the most right-wing figures among union officials, with close connections to the military-intelligence apparatus, American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, issued a statement praising Biden, although she stopped short of a formal endorsement. The AFT president said the former vice president’s entry into the race “gives Democrats a real choice between someone new and someone who has been in the trenches in this fight, including in the White House, for decades.” Citing Biden’s standing in first place in the polls, she said, “If the polls mean anything, there is a great reservoir of goodwill for him.”

The bulk of Biden’s speech was devoted to contrasting the economic bonanza for corporate America under the Trump administration, particularly from Trump’s tax cut for the wealthy, to the meager results for working-class families, although he invariably referred to workers as the “middle class,” as Democratic politicians have become accustomed to do over many decades in order to blur the reality of class divisions between the proletariat and the financial aristocracy.

If Biden had been honest, he would said that in the 10 years since the 2008 Wall Street crash, the super-rich have recovered everything and more, while the workers have recovered almost nothing—and that for eight of those 10 years, the Obama-Biden administration headed the federal government and spearheaded this massive accumulation of wealth at the top of American society. But no capitalist politician, Democratic or Republican, can be honest about such issues.

Perhaps the most revealing fact about the Duquesne rally is that Biden traveled to Pittsburgh to posture as the “friend of labor” after a fundraiser with multimillionaire corporate executives and lawyers at the Philadelphia-area home of David L. Cohen, executive vice president and chief lobbyist for Comcast Corporation, one of the 30 largest companies in America.

Biden topped the previous one-day fundraising records set by Bernie Sanders and Beto O’Rourke, raking in \$6.3 million in the 24 hours after he announced his candidacy April 25. At least \$700,000 came in from corporate fat cats at Cohen’s home, where Biden and former Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell put in appearances. Another attendee was Daniel J. Hilferty, the chief executive of the Independence Health Group, the parent company of Independence Blue Cross, a major health insurer in the state.



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