

The UAW at the Democratic National Convention: Gangsters and warmongers lock arms

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In the various stage-managed goings-on at this week's Democratic National Convention, the presence of the United Auto Workers stands out.

In her appearance, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer delivered her remarks live from a UAW local hall in Lansing. In a pre-recorded speech, former UAW President Bob King nominated Bernie Sanders for the party's presidential ticket, purely a formality given the majority of the delegates are pledged to Biden and Sanders himself long ago endorsed Biden. UAW Secretary-Treasurer Ray Curry appeared alongside US Senator Gary Peters (who, given the large number of right-wing Republicans invited to speak at this year's convention, we are obliged to confirm is a Democrat) as the representatives of the Michigan delegation.

Curry and Peters' joint statement was particularly significant because they praised the role played by Biden in the Obama administration's 2009 restructuring of the US auto industry. The Detroit-based automakers were returned to profitability through tens of thousands of job losses and the slashing of wages for new hires by one-half; in return for its cooperation, the UAW received tens of billions of dollars in GM stock and a seat on its board of directors. "We'd be nowhere without Joe Biden. A lot of people wanted Detroit to go bankrupt," Peters declared.

In fact, while Detroit-based *auto corporations* received tens of billions of dollars in federal bailouts, the *city* of Detroit was forced into bankruptcy in 2013. This was the result of a conspiracy involving both Republican then-governor Rick Snyder and Detroit Democrats, including the city's emergency manager and Obama backer Kevyn Orr, to loot the coffers of Detroit, converted by decades of plant closures from the center of the global auto industry to the poorest large city in America, to pay off its Wall Street creditors. Obama's Justice Department specifically intervened to block any lawsuits from retired city employees who wanted to protect their pensions.

The promotion of the UAW and other unions by the Democrats is calculated to portray this party of Wall Street and the Pentagon as a supposed champion of the working class. In reality, it demonstrates that one of the chief constituencies of the Democratic Party is the corrupt union apparatus, which both big business parties rely on to suppress the class struggle, increase the exploitation of workers and promote economic nationalism and militarism.

For autoworkers who are the victims of decades of betrayals, the oversized presence of the UAW at the convention is something of a provocation. After all, the UAW has been thoroughly exposed as a bought-and-paid-for agent of the auto companies. On Monday, two

days before the appearance of UAW officials, the Detroit News reported that the Justice Department was seeking to impose a 10-year-long federal oversight on the UAW to settle criminal corruption charges.

Ten UAW officials have already pleaded guilty to federal embezzlement and corruption charges, including bribes from FCA officials in exchange for favorable contract terms that cut wages and eliminated the eight-hour day. General Motors alleged in court earlier this month that the scale of corruption at FCA *alone* is an order of magnitude larger than what has already been uncovered, running in the tens of millions and involving an elaborate system of offshore bank accounts.

While the true scale of the bribery and graft which is endemic in the UAW may never be publicly revealed, Curry himself no doubt has an intimate knowledge from his position as secretary treasurer of the national union. Federal investigators, were they so inclined, could well have detained Curry for questioning the moment his video feed ended.

Former UAW President Gary Jones was unavailable to speak because he is awaiting sentencing after having pleaded guilty to embezzling \$1 million in union dues. Nor is the schedule open for Jones' predecessor Dennis Williams; he is on the verge of being indicted and the UAW itself has cut off financial support for his legal fees. While current President Rory Gamble was no doubt consulted in preparing the stage-managed appearances of Curry and King, it would not have been politic for Gamble himself to have appeared on camera, given the fact that he himself has been identified as the subject of an investigation.

While King has not been charged (so far), an earlier indictment revealed that King was fully aware of the illegal payoffs to union officials, telling a UAW vice president and a FCA executive at a 2011 private meeting that their amateurish scheme of laundering bribe money through the business of the union official's wife "was a bad idea" that could land him in jail.

Having imposed one sellout contract after another for more than four decades, including a sellout of last year's strike at General Motors, the UAW is now playing the key role in forcing autoworkers to work during the coronavirus pandemic and covering up the true scale of the infections in the plants.

The pushing forward of the UAW at the convention amounts to a stamp of approval by the Democratic Party for the services it has rendered and will in the future. In fact, Whitmer and other Democratic governors have been instrumental in the return to work in their states, even when such measures have violated their own lockdown orders.

California Governor Newsom even allowed Tesla CEO Elon Musk to re-open his electric car plant in northern California during local lockdown orders, without the slightest repercussions.

A third scheduled appearance further demonstrates the farcical character of the presentation of the UAW bureaucracy as the “representatives” of the working class. A puff piece in the *Detroit Free Press* last week described Gerald Lang as an ordinary autoworker from General Motors' Lake Orion Assembly, catapulted into stardom by an unexpected and deeply humbling invitation by Joe Biden to speak on his behalf at the convention.

Only in the fourth paragraph does the *Free Press* inform its readers in passing that Lang is Vice President of UAW Local 5960. They “forget” to inform their readers at all that he is a member of the Democratic Party's State Central Committee. While Lang has not yet delivered his speech as of this writing, he informed the *Free Press* that he would give a “plug for *my* company (emphasis added)” and attack “overseas” competition.

This nationalist and pro-company perspective has been the basis for the UAW's enforcement of one round of concessions after another. The Lake Orion facility is one of the poster children for this. The plant, which produces electric vehicles and prototype self-driving vehicles, was the subject of a secret “memorandum of understanding,” signed by UAW Vice President for GM Cindy Estrada, allowing the company to replace half of the workforce of 1,300 with low-wage temporary and contract labor.

For GM, the plant is a test-bed for its intended workforce of the future, composed of impoverished casual workers building easier-to-assemble electric vehicles.

One might ask: in pushing the UAW to the forefront of its convention, to whom exactly are the Democrats trying to appeal? Do they really expect the UAW's appearance to do anything but repulse autoworkers?

Widespread disgust with the party in de-industrialized states contributed to its debacle in 2016. The Democratic Party was wiped out in Michigan and Ohio, the center of the auto industry, and voter turnout for the Democratic presidential candidate fell especially sharply in the city of Detroit, where the party is correctly associated with a social catastrophe. Trump is also deeply unpopular in both states, but the only institution which might be more discredited than the two capitalist parties is the UAW itself.

The UAW has faced off against repeated rebellions from autoworkers, including the rejection of the 2015 Fiat Chrysler contract which was since revealed to have been pushed through with bribes, the 2019 GM strike and, most importantly, a wave of wildcat strikes this year which temporarily defeated the UAW-company attempt to keep the plants running during the pandemic and forced a two-month shutdown in the North American auto industry. Now, autoworkers at plants throughout the country are taking the next step by forming rank-and-file safety committees independent of and in opposition to the UAW.

The answer to this question is simple. The UAW's presence at the convention is because they, together with the union bureaucracy as a whole, form part of the real constituency of the Democratic Party. All of the other privileged constituencies also received their own speaking appearances. The financial oligarchy is represented by, among others, billionaire CEO Meg Whitman and the “senator from Wall Street” Chuck Schumer; the military-intelligence apparatus, represented by Colin Powell, countless other retired generals and Pentagon officials and Biden himself; and the upper-middle class and bourgeois

proponents of identity and racial policies. The trade union bureaucracy, earning *declared* incomes in the hundreds of thousands sweated out of the backs of the working class, is one of the privileged constituencies.

In the fall, workers will be under immense pressure by the media and political establishment to vote for Biden. The argument will be made that failure to vote for the Democratic candidate, either by abstaining or voting instead for a third party or socialist candidate, will make them personally responsible for the rise of American fascism.

The danger represented by Trump is certainly real. But the lineup on the party's virtual platform of the thieves and gangsters in the union bureaucracy alongside war criminals, billionaires and millionaires provide a glimpse of the real face of the Democratic Party. They are, no less than Trump, representatives of the *real* social base of dictatorship: the capitalist ruling class.

This is why the Democrats, who have done nothing in the face of Trump's attempts at a presidential coup while impeaching him for jeopardizing the drive to war against Russia and appealing to the military against him, are opposing Trump largely from the right. While they have made certain muted criticisms at the convention of Trump's handling of the pandemic, the Democrats fully support his drive to re-open schools and workplaces, exposing millions to infection and possible death to pay for the massive bailout of Wall Street and the corporations fully backed by both parties. To impose this, the Democrats will promote their own brand of authoritarianism.

This is also why the first condition for the fight against dictatorship, as well as the fight against the homicidal return-to-work campaign, is the political independence of the working class from capitalist politics, in all of its forms, and a break from their agents in the trade unions. This requires in the first place the development of a network of rank-and-file safety committees at auto plants, schools and workplaces throughout the country.

It also requires the building of an independent political movement of the working class, based on revolutionary socialist politics. The building of such a movement is why the Socialist Equality Party, which publishes the World Socialist Web Site, is running its own candidates, Joseph Kishore and Norissa Santa Cruz, in the presidential elections.



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