

Speaking before auto union bureaucrats in Michigan, Biden makes nationalist appeal

Patrick Martin
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Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden made his first appearance in Michigan of the fall campaign, delivering a right-wing appeal based entirely on economic nationalism and a glorification of the corrupt union officialdom.

The choice of venue and audience said a great deal about the political orientation of the Democratic Party campaign. Biden made his remarks at the headquarters of Region 1 of the United Auto Workers (UAW) in Warren, in suburban Macomb County just north of Detroit's east side.

His audience was comprised largely of union officials and Democratic Party politicians, including Governor Gretchen Whitmer, Senator Debbie Stabenow and Representative Andy Levin. Among the UAW officials whose presence was acknowledged were Cindy Estrada, vice president for Fiat Chrysler, Gerard Kariem, vice president for Ford, Region 1 Director Frank Stuglin, and Region 1D Director Steve Dawes.

The union officials who emceed and made the introductions were too diplomatic to note the reason for the absence of other high-ranking officials: they are guests of the federal government at various country-club prisons or working on plea bargains, on charges of taking bribes from the auto companies or stealing workers' dues money, to minimize their stays. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that Biden could have spoken to more top UAW officials behind bars than were able to attend the rally at Region 1—although social distancing would have been a problem in a prison cell.

Despite a blast against Trump over the coronavirus, citing the revelations in a new book by Bob Woodward showing that the president systematically lied to the American people about the dangers of the pandemic for months, Biden was silent on the role of the UAW in

enforcing the return to work at General Motors, Ford, Fiat Chrysler and the auto supplier plants, which has put tens of thousands of workers' lives at risk from COVID-19.

Biden promoted one of the most egregious fictions of capitalist politics—that the unions represent or are even identical to the working class. He declared, "Unions built this country. Unions built the economic engine that has driven America, and its manufacturing dynamism. And literally, in the case of the autoworkers, you are the ones who did it."

Biden hailed his own work as the leader of the Obama administration's auto task force, claiming that it helped save the auto industry while saying nothing about the tens of thousands of jobs lost and the slashing of wages and benefits that ensued.

He pledged to be the most pro-union president in American history, although to the vast majority of union members that amounts to a threat to side with the gangsters who sell them out, and is unlikely to produce a groundswell of popular support at the polls.

The main thrust of Biden's remarks was to attack Trump for failing to carry out many of the economic nationalist measures he promised in 2016: stopping the offshoring of jobs, "bringing back" jobs to the United States, halting auto plant closings, and enforcing "buy American" provisions in federal contracting.

After contrasting Trump's claims of a great economy to the reality—that net job creation in the first three years of the Trump administration, before the coronavirus, was even lower than during the last three years of the Obama-Biden administration—Biden resumed his nationalist critique:

"What about offshoring? Has Trump delivered on stopping companies from shipping jobs overseas, American jobs? You already know the answer. Of

course not. The rate of offshoring by federal contractors—these are people that get federal dollars from the federal government to do things. They’re offshoring.”

“Big companies being paid by US taxpayers have doubled under Trump,” Biden continued. “He invited companies to the White House to make what he called a pledge to American workers. He couldn’t even keep those firms from outsourcing. Many were given lucrative federal contracts, but then some of them turned around and shipped 7,000 jobs overseas. Under President Trump the US trade deficit has grown. It has hit an all-time high.”

Pharmaceutical companies had outsourced production facilities, “and then sending those same foreign-made drugs back to American consumers,” he said, leading to a situation during the coronavirus pandemic that exposed “the enormous vulnerability this creates for our own health security.” He continued: “Our security requires us to have supply chains of the necessary drugs based here, not overseas, not overseas, in times of crisis.”

Biden then switched to an even more reactionary form of nationalism, attacking Trump for his alleged slurs against American soldiers as “losers” and “suckers” for going to war and being killed, wounded or captured. He cited his own son’s deployment to Kosovo and then to Iraq, both times in the service of military operations launched by American imperialism.

Returning to his theme of defending American capitalist manufacturing, Biden cited both his role in the bailout of the auto bosses—which came at the expense of the jobs, benefits and working conditions of auto workers—and in the forced bankruptcy of the city of Detroit, which led to sweeping cuts in benefits and pensions for city employees, as well as the partial privatization of key assets such as the water and sewage system and the Detroit Institute of Arts.

In the only policy measure unveiled in the course of the speech, Biden said an incoming Democratic administration would impose a 10 percent tax penalty on companies that offshore jobs, together with a 10 percent tax credit for companies that bring offshored jobs back to the United States.

In part, this is pure demagoguery. Biden campaign officials have no doubt already informed the auto bosses and other corporations that no such penalties

will be applied, although the tax credits and other measures to put more money into the coffers of big business will no doubt be enacted.

There were a few grandiose Trump-style flourishes as well, including a pledge to build 500,000 charging stations for electric vehicles and to convert all federal government vehicles from internal combustion to electric (something that would provide a guaranteed market for US electric vehicle manufacturers, no doubt with a huge subsidy).

More nationalist demagoguery concluded the speech. “I do not accept the defeatist view that the forces of automation and globalization mean we cannot keep good-paying union jobs and create more,” he said.

The truth is that “good-paying union jobs” ceased to exist decades ago, and the only “good living” provided by the UAW is for the thousands of highly paid executives and “international reps” at Solidarity House and at regional offices around the country. The auto companies, with the full support of the UAW, have split up the work force into myriad tiers, each more exploited and underpaid than the last, driving down wages and conditions particularly for the younger generation of workers.



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