

Biden recruits unions to keep workplaces open as pandemic surges

Jerry White

17 November 2020

President-elect Joseph Biden met with top corporate executives and union leaders on Monday before delivering a brief speech on his plans to “get the economy back on track,” even as the US faces a surge of COVID-19 cases and a winter in which the death toll could nearly double.

Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris held the online meeting with the CEOs of General Motors, Microsoft, Target and the Gap, along with the presidents of the AFL-CIO, the United Auto Workers (UAW), the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

Afterwards Biden boasted, “I wish you could’ve heard — corporate leaders and labor leaders singing the same hymnal here.” He added, “I made it clear to the corporate leaders. I said, ‘I want you to know I’m a union guy. Unions are going to have increased power.’ They just nodded, they understand. It’s not anti-business. It’s about economic growth, creating good-paying jobs.”

Executives like UAW President Rory Gamble are not “labor leaders” but paid stooges of corporate management. The UAW is presently concealing outbreaks in the auto plants and threatening workers who reveal cases on social media. In the last month alone, there have been hundreds of new infections and at least two deaths, including Mark Bianchi at Fiat Chrysler’s Sterling Heights Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit.

UFCW President Marc Perrone is equally guilty. At least 546 meatpacking plants have had confirmed cases of COVID-19, nearly 50,000 meatpacking workers tested positive and at least 249 meatpacking workers have died across the industry, according to data

collected by Food Environment Reporting Network. There have been tens of thousands of more grocery and food processing workers infected.

The same is true for Mary Kay Henry of the SEIU, whose members include many of the more than 1,000 nursing home workers who have died since the pandemic began, in addition to the unknown number of hospital service workers.

The meeting between Biden and the CEOs and union executives comes as the pandemic is spiraling out of control. Trump, who has refused to concede the election and is continuing his conspiracy to nullify the result, has made clear that there will be no shutdown of non-essential production. Trump’s incitement of fascistic violence is inextricably connected to the ruling class policy of “herd immunity.”

The Democratic Party, a party of Wall Street, is terrified of doing or saying anything that will spook the markets or encourage mass opposition. It knows that there is growing anger in the working class that threatens to erupt in walkouts and strikes. Last March, wildcat action by autoworkers forced the shutdown of the North American auto industry and lockdowns across the country.

The Democrats are opposed to implementing the measures necessary to contain the virus. In his speech, Biden admitted, “We’re going into a very dark winter, things are going to get much tougher before they get easier. That requires sparing no effort to fight COVID, so that we can open our businesses safely, resume our lives and put this pandemic behind us.”

The governors of Illinois, Michigan and other industrial states have acknowledged that manufacturing sites have become one of the major vectors for the transmission of COVID-19. The safest way to stop the spread of the deadly disease is to halt all non-essential

production. But the corporate and financial oligarchy will not tolerate any further interference with its money-making operations. Speaking for the interests of Wall Street, the Democrats, from Biden down to the governors in Illinois, Michigan, New York, California and other states have opposed the closing of factories and schools to save lives.

After Biden's remarks Monday, a reporter asked him, "Do you think more governors should be shutting non-essential businesses and reinstating stay home orders?" Biden dodged the question, first saying "it depends on the state," and then switching over to praising Republican governors in North Dakota, Utah and Ohio for implementing mask mandates.

In fact, Biden and his top aides have repeatedly rejected the shutdown of non-essential industries. As the *Washington Post* reported Tuesday, "The consensus on the advisory board is that we are not seeking to impose a national lockdown again," said Celine Gounder, a clinical assistant professor at the NYU Grossman School of Medicine and a member of Biden's newly formed coronavirus panel. Biden, she added, "has not said he would entertain a national lockdown. He has made it very clear in those meetings as well that he really wants to be more targeted in terms of restrictions."

Last week, one member of the task force, Michael Osterholm, said there should be a four- to six-week national shutdown and that all affected workers and small businesspeople should be compensated. After the stock market began to fall, the Biden team quickly disassociated itself from these statements.

For Biden, the *Post* continued, "avoiding widespread shutdowns the country used in the spring means his administration will need to rely on an alternate set of strategies to curtail the virus."

The meeting with the corporate and union leaders signaled that the president-elect's "alternate set of strategies" includes making greater use of the trade unions to promote the false narrative about "reopening businesses safely" and to suppress the growing demands by workers to halt non-essential production.

Workers must take the initiative in their own hands. In several major auto plants and school districts, workers have already begun to set up rank-and-file safety committees, independent of the unions, to break the conspiracy of silence on outbreaks, fight for control

of health and safety and demand a nationwide strike to shut down non-essential production and schools, and provide full compensation for all affected workers and small businesses.

At the same time, essential workers must have state-of-the-art personal protective equipment and full staffing, with their health and safety conditions monitored and enforced by rank-and-file safety committees.

These committees must be expanded to every factory, workplace, school and university. With signs that a vaccine will be coming in the next year, everything must be done to save lives now.

The guiding principle that must guide this fight is that the health and safety of workers must take precedent over the profits of the giant corporations and Wall Street. A genuine strategy to fight the pandemic requires a vast redistribution of society's resources to guarantee universal and regular testing, contact tracing and free medical treatment.

A massive public works program must be launched to hire the unemployed, build the infrastructure needed for the distribution of the vaccine and eradicate poverty. To fight for this, the working class must wage a political struggle for socialism against both corporate-backed parties and the capitalist system of social inequality and mass death, which they defend.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)