

In Detroit visit, Biden praises UAW as it sells out Deere strike

Jerry White

18 November 2021

During a visit to Detroit Wednesday to tout the opening of a new General Motors electric vehicle factory, President Biden went out of his way to praise the United Auto Workers union. The president's accolades came on the same day as the UAW used gangster methods to shut down the defiant month-long strike by 10,100 John Deere workers.

Biden spoke from the floor of GM's "Factory Zero" to a small group of GM executives, UAW bureaucrats and Michigan Democrats. Only a few hand-picked factory workers were present. Before starting his speech, Biden singled out the UAW president, declaring, "No one does more to look out for American autoworkers than Ray Curry."

Such a comment could only provoke disgusted laughter from John Deere and other workers. The UAW president has "looked out for" the Deere workers by repeatedly trying to force a pro-company contract down their throats, stringing them out on \$275 a week in strike benefits, and doing the company's dirty work by holding a revote on a contract that workers already rejected. On Wednesday, the UAW claimed the six-year deal had been ratified.

The main purpose of Biden's visit was to promote the bipartisan infrastructure bill, which includes subsidies to the automakers to expand production of electric vehicles. In his remarks, Biden reiterated that his administration sees EV production as vital to American capitalism's "competition to win the 21st century" against China and other economic rivals.

By 2023, China is expected to be home to 62 percent of global lithium-ion battery manufacturing capacity, according to the UAW.

"China has been leading in this race, but that's about to change," Biden declared. "For the first time in 20 years, we're spending more money on infrastructure

than China." Speaking in front of a giant American flag, he declared, "The jobs of the future end up in Michigan, not halfway around the world." Biden noted that Michigan Democrats had sponsored a bill to give consumers additional tax incentives to buy "union-made" electric vehicles.

Biden and the auto executives are counting on the UAW to impose the savage wage and job-cutting demands of GM, Ford and other US-based car makers in order to compete with Chinese and European manufacturers. Electric-powered vehicles have far fewer parts than their internal combustion engine counterparts and require an estimated 30 percent less manpower. Automakers are expected to wipe tens of thousands of jobs and outsource battery and other component production. To assure that these will be "union jobs," the UAW is fully prepared to impose poverty wages and sweatshop conditions on workers.

Since taking office, Biden has sought to strengthen the grip of trade union bureaucracy and make it more directly the instrument of government directives. The aim of this corporatist policy is to suppress the growing wave of struggles against the pandemic and social inequality, and to corral workers behind the administration's increasingly provocative economic and military measures against China. The UAW, which has spent decades promoting anti-Asian and "Buy American" chauvinism to divert opposition to its collusion with the auto bosses, is more than happy to jump on Biden's anti-Chinese bandwagon.

In an effort to provide a political cover for the rampant corruption and corporatism of the UAW, Biden incorporated a bit more populist demagoguery into his remarks in Detroit than in his speech Monday before signing the infrastructure bill into law.

He said that when critics asked how he was going to

pay for his spending plan, he would respond, “Well, I’ll tell you what, real simple: I come from the corporate capital of the world. More corporations incorporated in my state of Delaware than all states combined. And guess what? They ain’t paying enough.” Then gesturing to GM CEO Mary Barra, he joked, “Sorry, Mary.”

Biden was referring to the notorious role that his tiny state plays in the affairs of American capitalism, with state laws so favorable to business interests that Delaware has become the headquarters of convenience for companies seeking to evade taxes.

Again reassuring his real constituency in corporate America, he continued, “Look, I’m a capitalist. If want—if you want to—if you’re able to make a million or a billion dollars, have at it. That’s good for everybody, except pay your fair share... I want them make money. That’s good, but pay a little. Pay a little.”

GM’s new factory is a \$2 billion reconversion of its former Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly Plant (DHAM), which GM planned to close in 2019. As part of the rotten deal the UAW signed to end the six-week strike by 48,000 GM workers, the factory was “saved” while GM moved ahead to close the Lordstown, Ohio assembly plant and several others in the US and Canada. In 2017, DHAM employed more than 3,000 workers. Factory Zero is expected to employ 2,200 when it ramps up to full production.

The UAW, which also unabashedly defends capitalism, has spent decades imposing savage wage and benefit cuts on autoworkers, sanctioning the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs and overseeing the conversion of Detroit, Cleveland and countless other cities into industrial wastelands and centers of hunger and poverty.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the UAW’s role as a corporate enforcer has intensified. Concealing outbreaks and the deaths of dozens of autoworkers, the UAW has been preoccupied with keeping the factories open and preventing a repeat of the wave of wildcat strikes against the spread of COVID, which shut down the North American auto industry in March 2020.

On the day that Biden arrived, the *Detroit Free Press* ran an article noting that “Michigan is now worst Covid-19 hotspot in nation; hospitals pushed to capacity.” Students and teachers at Martin Luther King High School in Detroit, three miles south of where

Biden was speaking, walked out to protest unsafe conditions that have led to an outbreak of the disease.

Biden’s reliance on the services of the trade union bureaucracy to hold back an upheaval of the working class only underscores the precarious position of the capitalist political establishment, and why sections of the ruling class are promoting fascistic forces.

Autoworkers and millions of other workers know the UAW is nothing but a criminal syndicate. Over the last four years, 11 UAW officials and one widow of an official have been convicted of taking company bribes to sign pro-company contracts, embezzling dues money, racketeering and other crimes.

Last week, Timothy Edmunds, secretary-treasurer of UAW Local 412 in the Detroit suburbs, turned himself in at the Livingston County Jail after a six-day manhunt over embezzlement charges. According to the legal complaint, Edmunds, who was paid \$142,293 last year by the UAW, “systematically drained” the union local’s bank accounts of about \$2 million.

The *Detroit News* reported, “He used the labor group’s credit cards for personal purchases, cashing local checks and transferring money into his accounts, according to the criminal case.” He used union money for “high-end shopping sprees at Louis Vuitton, Balenciaga and Apple.” Prosecutors said he was a regular at the Detroit Greektown Casino, putting more than \$16 million in play—betting over \$10,000 a day—between 2016 and 2020.

Terrified that the victory of the Deere workers would spark a broader movement against all the illegitimate contracts signed by the bribe-taking union officials, the UAW set out to defeat the Deere workers with lies and threats. But workers at Deere, Dana, Volvo Trucks and other workplaces, are increasingly organizing themselves in rank-and-file factory committees to defeat the treachery of the pro-company unions and mobilize their strength.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact