

In warmongering speech, Biden lines up trade unions for US-NATO proxy war against Russia

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In a warmongering speech before a major trade union conference last week, President Biden lined up the trade union bureaucracy to back the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. The speech was part of the administration's efforts to put together a "labor front" with the AFL-CIO unions to suppress the opposition to the demands for massive sacrifice to pay for American imperialism's preparation for all-out war against Russia.

Biden spoke to a legislative conference of North America's Building Trades Unions (NABTU), a federation of 14 national construction unions. The entire first half of Biden's speech was devoted exclusively to the war in Ukraine. His remarks left no doubt that, far from their hypocritical claims to be defending "freedom" and "human rights," the US and NATO are using Ukraine as a launching pad for a regime change operation in Russia and the transformation of the country into a semi-colony of the Western powers.

Biden bragged about the devastation wreaked by sanctions on the Russian economy, citing the fact that its GDP has shrunk by double digits. "Just in one year, our sanctions are likely to wipe out the last 15 years of Russia's economic gains," Biden said. "And because we've cut Russia off from importing technologies like semiconductors and encryption security and critical components of quantum technology that they need to compete in the 21st century, we're going to stifle Russia's ability and its economy to grow for years to come."

Biden said the reason for the military setbacks inflicted by Ukraine against Russia are due to arms and training which NATO has flooded into Ukraine for years. "We've trained them, and we've given them the weapons." The announcement of each new weapons system sent to the Ukrainian military and the prospect of the destruction of

the Russian economy evoked raucous applause from the assembled union officials.

The speech demonstrated the staggering degree of recklessness which prevails in the Biden administration. Washington has deliberately incited the war and is risking a nuclear exchange with the world's second largest nuclear power.

Biden made it clear that the US was preparing a long, drawn-out war, which would require massive sacrifice from workers in terms of economic and human costs. "This war could continue for a long time, but the United States will continue to stand with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people in the fight for freedom. And I just want you to know that."

Significantly, Biden added, "If I got to go to war, I'm going with you guys. I'll tell you. I mean it."

But they will not be the highly paid and corrupt union bureaucrats in the Washington D.C. conference hall who will be going off to war. They will be the sons and daughters of workers. The only "war" Biden is recruiting the union executives for is the war against the working class, which, after three decades of non-stop wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and other countries, is wary of and hostile to the launching of another military intervention, especially one that could lead to world war.

Biden needs the AFL-CIO to impose the costs of war on workers, including further cuts to vital social programs to pay for the Pentagon's massive \$782 billion budget, plus tens of billions more for military aid to Ukraine, and the costs of US troop deployments to Eastern Europe. On top of that, the economic dislocation caused by the war and Russian sanctions have sharply drive up the cost of fuel, food and other commodities, costing workers nearly \$300 more a month.

And the pandemic, which has already led to 1 million unnecessary deaths due to the prioritization of profit over life, is far from over, with a new Omicron subvariant BA.2 surging across the US.

Biden hopes to divert the anger of workers over these conditions by creating an artificial “national unity” through his reckless drive to war.

The obstacle to this plan for labor peace, however, is that the unions are deeply discredited and despised after decades of pro-company betrayals. The assembled crowd whom Biden addressed does not speak for workers. They are a privileged stratum of bureaucrats, earning six figure salaries (NABTU President Sean McGarvey alone made \$424,252 last year). McGarvey & Co. are thoroughly hostile to the interests of workers, but expect to rake in a share of the profits corporate America will make from the war.

The NABTU member unions include the Teamsters and the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART-TD), which are actively enforcing a strike injunction at BNSF railroad. A federal judge who banned strikes against BNSF’s brutal new attendance policy cited the need to secure American supply chains. The Biden administration is actively recruiting the Teamsters, along with the United Steelworkers, the United Auto Workers, and other unions, to secure the supply of vital minerals and other resources as it also ramps up for war against China.

The last several years has seen an explosive growth of the class struggle in the US and internationally. This has taken the form of a direct confrontation between militant workers and the corporatist unions.

The economic and social consequences of the drive to war are leading to an explosive growth of the class struggle and further rebellion by rank-and-file workers. The mass protests in Sri Lanka demanding the removal of the government are part of a global upsurge of class struggle against inflation, food and energy shortages, and demands for austerity.

In the United States, the war fever which has gripped the union bureaucracy and other privileged layers has had limited impact on workers, who are far more concerned with increasingly impossible social conditions they face at home. Since the beginning of the year, there have been scores of strikes, including teachers in Minneapolis and Sacramento, and oil workers in northern California. Tens of thousands of workers have contracts expiring in the next few months, including more than 20,000 West Coast dock workers.

From the first two world wars to Korea and Vietnam to the wars of the 21st century, the American trade unions have been highly integrated with the imperialist intrigues of the US government. This role continues today in Ukraine. American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, who has high-level ties to the Democratic Party, was on the ground in Kiev in 2014 during the US-backed right-wing coup, which toppled the pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovich. She returned to the region earlier this month in a visit to Poland, where she posed for photo ops with Ukrainian refugees.

But the AFT president’s supposed concern for human rights does not extend to the US school system, where she has played the central role in beating back the opposition of teachers and parents to school reopenings and an end to COVID safety measures.

Biden’s paeans to “national unity” cannot conceal the fact that the US is a society riven by deep, irreconcilable class divisions, which have only been deepened by the massive government bailout of Wall Street. The Biden administration, working with the unions, has imposed a de facto wage cut on workers, with average raises of 2–3 percent, while inflation is at a 40-year high. At the same time, the oil and gas companies, agribusiness giants and arms manufacturers are engaged in naked war profiteering. This will drive workers into conflict against the government, the pro-war unions and the capitalist and imperialist system they defend.

Workers need new organizations of struggle—rank-and-file factory and workplace committees—to oppose the betrayals of the unions and launch a powerful industrial and political counter-offensive to defend their interests. The fight for economic and social demands, however, must be fused with the struggle to unite the working class internationally against the reckless drive by the ruling class towards nuclear Armageddon. The working class, which creates society’s wealth but is exploited and oppressed under capitalism, has no stake in the imperialist re-division of the world and is the basic social force that can and must be mobilized against war and for international socialism.



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