The Nation promotes Teamsters, UAW bureaucracy, says contract campaigns key to "reset working-class vote" for Democrats

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Half a million workers at United Parcel Service (UPS) and the Detroit Three auto corporations face major battles this summer with their labor agreements expiring on July 31 at UPS and September 14 at GM, Ford and Stellantis.

These struggles pit workers not only against the employers but the Teamsters and the United Auto Workers bureaucracies. Despite their militant-sounding rhetoric, the so-called "reform" factions, led by IBT President Sean O'Brien and UAW President Shawn Fain, are just as committed as their predecessors to beating back the resistance of workers to another round of pro-company contracts.

O'Brien and Fain have the closest relations to the Biden administration and the Democratic Party, which are determined to block strikes by these powerful sections of the working class and prevent any disruption to their expanding military confrontations with Russia and China.

To conceal this conspiracy from rank-and-file workers, a concerted propaganda campaign has been carried out in the media, and particularly publications aligned with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and other pseudo-left supporters of the union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party, to present O'Brien and Fain as insurgent militants.

One example of this mythmaking is the June 27 column in the *Nation* magazine, titled, "Contract talks by Teamsters and the UAW have the potential to change our politics." It is written by *Nation* columnist Jane McAlevey, a former executive board member of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), currently a Senior Policy Fellow at the University of California-Berkeley's Institute for Research on Labor and Employment.

According to McAlevey, the momentous struggle that the two unions are supposedly waging against corporate America can also save American democracy from the threat of Trump and fascism. Aware of the popular anger in the working class against Biden's pro-business and pro-war policies, McAlevey omits any mention of the Democratic president and his party, but she makes it clear what she has in mind.

> [The] nationwide negotiations by the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and the United Auto Workers (UAW) have the potential to provide swing-state voters with their own political education in the lead-up to the 2024 election.

She adds that the IBT and UAW "have a chance to educate American voters about who is to blame for the pain in their lives … by making contract negotiations a classroom that exposes the corporate elite's destructive agenda and shows how to build a better, fairer, and more just country—starting in the workplace," concluding:

> With major UPS hubs located in battleground states including Georgia, Pennsylvania, Arizona, and Wisconsin, and auto plants clustered in Michigan and Ohio, these negotiations—which include the potential for big strikes like those waged by the teachers' unions—could reset the working-class vote in 2024.

That is, McAlevey sees the "reform" bureaucracies as critical in bolstering the Democratic Party in the coming election and beyond.

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If McAlevey were to be honest about “who is to blame for the pain in workers’ lives,” she would point the finger at her friends in the union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party, who have spent decades colluding in the destruction of workers’ jobs, living standards and social programs, even as trillions were funneled to the corporate and financial elite.

The betrayals of the union bureaucracy—including by the teachers unions—and the anti-working class character of the Democratic Party have allowed Trump and the fascistic Republicans to grotesquely palm themselves off as champions of the “working class.”

It should not be forgotten that the Obama administration—with then Vice President Biden—imposed historic concessions on autoworkers, including the two-tier wage system and the abolition of cost-of-living raises, during the 2009 bankruptcy restructuring of GM and Chrysler. This was done with the full collusion of the UAW bureaucracy, including Shawn Fain. Biden’s push to slash jobs and wages for electric vehicle production will mean further devastation for Detroit, Cleveland, Toledo and other cities that have suffered decades of deindustrialization.

In the last year alone, the Democratic Socialists of America members of Congress have endorsed the US/NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, the outlawing of last year’s railroad strike and the imposition of a pro-company contract that railroad workers had previously rejected.

While Trump and the Republicans demand the deportation of socialists and Marxists, Biden and the Democratic Party rely on the anti-communist thugs in the AFL-CIO bureaucracy to suppress the class struggle and defend capitalist rule. If it fails to do so, the Democrats will resort to state repression and authoritarian methods against a threat by a politically radicalized working class.

Since taking office, Biden has only strengthened the fascistic coup-plotters in the Republican Party, as part of his efforts to maintain “bipartisan unity” for the war against Russia and the coming military confrontation with China. At the same time, Biden, the self-proclaimed “most pro-union president in US history,” has further integrated the union bureaucracy into the capitalist state structure, to block strikes in decisive industries like the oil industry, the railroads and the docks and impose the labor discipline and austerity measures necessary for the conversion of the US to a wartime economy.

Trade union bureaucrats like O’Brien and Fain are the chief front men of the Democratic Party in the unions. O’Brien has been a frequent visitor to the White House while Fain is pitching the UAW bureaucracy as the only force Biden can rely on to impose the job and wage-cutting necessary for US automakers to compete with China in the electric vehicle market.

McAlevey and the upper-middle-class stratum in the union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party that she speaks for fear an insurgent movement of the working class far more than the danger of fascism. They are keenly aware of that last year’s campaign by Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president, won 5,000 votes even though the UAW bureaucracy did everything to disenfranchise UAW members. Since then, workers have increasingly taken up Lehman’s call for the formation of new centers of working class power and decision-making in the factories, through the expansion of the autoworkers network of rank-and-file committees, under the direction of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

There is no doubt that a powerful movement of the working class, uniting black and white, native born and immigrant workers, would pull the rug from underneath the fascist demagogy of Trump, DeSantis and other reactionary Republicans. Such a movement cannot be politically subordinated to the Democratic Party, a party of Wall Street, the Pentagon and the affluent upper-middle class that provide the personnel to the union bureaucracy and its acolytes. For the working class the defense of democratic rights is inseparable from the fight against capitalism and war, and the struggle for workers’ power and socialism.

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