

Biden to visit picket lines to bolster UAW apparatus and its betrayal of auto strike

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US President Joe Biden will be visiting the picket lines of striking autoworkers in Michigan on Tuesday. In the media, Biden's tourist stop is being presented as an "unprecedented" and "historic" statement of support from a sitting US president for workers. In reality, it is an effort to bolster an increasingly discredited United Auto Workers president, Shawn Fain, lend credibility to his stay on the job "strike," and facilitate a sellout of the workers.

Biden's trip follows Fain's announcement of the "expansion" of the autoworkers strike on Friday. In a strike that has been characterized by unprecedented lying and deceit from the apparatus, the latest maneuver takes the cake. Only another 5,600 workers were called out at GM and Stellantis parts distribution centers, which supply dealerships, not production facilities. No assembly, engine or other component plants are affected, and there will be virtually no impact on the profits of the companies. Even financial analysts expressed surprise at how ineffectual Fain's announcement was.

The parts distribution workers join workers at just three plants called out on September 15. Eighty-eight percent of UAW workers in the Big Three remain on the job. They are being told by the UAW to "stand up" and go back to work without a contract, often with forced overtime, and with no protection against management layoffs and victimization.

Biden's trip also follows the fraudulent claim by the Unifor union in Canada Sunday that its tentative agreement covering 5,600 workers at Ford had been passed by a razor-thin margin of 54 percent.

The contract was "passed" in the most anti-democratic manner possible, with workers forced to vote after a tightly controlled Zoom meeting where they were given self-serving highlights of the agreement. There are reports of workers being unable to vote, and of Unifor officials violating their own election rules by sending out last-minute emails to temporary workers. This came after a 24-hour extension of the contract to block strike action while the fraud was organized and guarantees were put in place that the vote would result in the desired outcome.

The actions of the Unifor apparatus in Canada are a warning to workers in the United States. Biden's trip is intended to set the stage for the announcement of a "historic" deal at Ford, which will, in fact, be completely in line with the companies' demands. Fain announced Friday that "real progress" had been made with Ford, whose parts distribution centers were excluded from Fain's "expansion" of the strike.

A conspiracy is underway, involving the UAW apparatus, corporate management, and the Biden administration—along with their counterparts in Canada—in opposition to the determination of rank-and-file workers to carry out a genuine struggle to reverse concessions and win real gains.

Biden's direct intervention is motivated by several factors.

There is, first of all, the determination to force through pro-company contracts. To present it as Fain does—that Biden and other big business politicians need to "decide which side they're on"—is an exercise in deceit. Fain and Biden both know which side he's on. He's been representing the corporations throughout his entire political career.

This is the same president who brokered a "historic" sellout agreement with the railroad unions last year. When workers proceeded to reject it, Biden worked with both parties in Congress to ban a strike and force the contract through anyway. It should also be recalled that in 2009, the Obama administration, working in collaboration with the UAW and with Biden then as vice president, oversaw the bankruptcy and restructuring of the auto companies, destroying tens of thousands of jobs, slashing the wages of new hires in half, banning strikes and cutting health care for retirees.

For Biden, however, even more pressing considerations are involved. The president will be traveling to Detroit only days after delivering remarks at the United Nations, presaging an immense escalation of the US-NATO war against Russia over Ukraine. This was followed by a meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and the announcement, over the weekend, that the Biden

administration is planning on sending Ukraine long-range missiles, capable of striking deep into Russian territory.

Congress is currently discussing \$24 billion in military assistance to Ukraine, coming on top of \$113 billion spent so far. All of this and more must be paid for by intensifying the exploitation of the working class.

Behind the scenes, the Biden administration is preparing an even more massive escalation of the conflict. In the aftermath of the debacle of the Ukrainian “spring offensive,” the ruling class is preparing to transition from a war that has been directed and armed by the US and NATO powers into a full-scale war involving US and NATO troops.

War abroad requires the suppression of the class struggle and the development of a wartime economy at home. Biden’s moves to aid Fain and the UAW apparatus in betraying the struggle of autoworkers comes amid the Writers Guild of America seeking to shut down the months-long strike of actors and writers. The ruling class is confronting a growing wave of social anger, including massive strike authorization votes among healthcare workers and academic workers.

Throughout his administration, Biden has pursued a strategy of corporatism—the integration of the government with the corporations and the unions based on the defense of the capitalist system. This is now entering a new stage.

“In time of war or revolution,” Leon Trotsky, the co-leader of the Russian Revolution, wrote in the founding document of the Fourth International, “when the bourgeoisie is plunged into exceptional difficulties, trade union leaders usually become bourgeois ministers.” Trotsky was writing at a time when the administration of FDR was drawing the trade unions into the state to put fetters on the strike movement of the 1930s.

This was a period in which the ruling class, based on the strength of American capitalism, sought to contain the class struggle through a policy of social reform. That time has long since passed. The apparatus of the trade unions, meanwhile, has overseen decades of concessions, transforming itself in the process into an arm of corporate management.

Two additional points are critical for workers to understand. First, the war against Russia is seen by the ruling class as preparatory to war with China. The Biden administration views the transition to electric vehicles (EVs) in relation to the escalating economic and geopolitical conflict with China and the scramble to dominate access to critical minerals. To boost the profitability of EV production, the auto companies are preparing a jobs massacre, with Ford CEO Jim Farley predicting the elimination of 40 percent of current employment. Whatever inadequate wage increases are included in the “historic”

contracts agreed to by the UAW will be window dressing for agreeing to this.

Second, Biden’s visit to the picket lines will be followed by a rally organized by former president Donald Trump in Michigan on Wednesday. The fascist Trump will use his remarks to spread nationalist poison, directed in particular at workers in China, while calling for the elimination of all restrictions on corporate profit and exploitation.

Both the leading 2024 presidential candidates are despised by significant sections of the population. The UAW bureaucracy is promoting Biden, the false friend of workers. Trump is trying to capitalize on the hostility among workers to Biden and the UAW apparatus. For the moment, both the Democrat Biden and the Republican Trump are paying lip service to workers’ grievances while attempting to keep opposition within channels that do not threaten capitalism. But they will not hesitate to deploy all the powers of the state against workers if they feel it necessary.

There is growing anger among autoworkers and demands for an all-out, industry-wide strike. After his photo-op on the picket line, Biden will no doubt pull Fain aside and ask him the question that he did at their White House meeting in July: “Do you have the situation under control?”

The working class must respond by asserting its own control over the struggle, through the building of a network of rank-and-file committees to demand and organize an all-out fight throughout the Big Three plants and beyond. It is only through the development of organizations independent of the trade union apparatus that a real fight can be waged, which will mobilize behind it the support of workers throughout the United States and around the world.

At the same time, the ever more direct intervention of the state in suppressing the class struggle makes clear that workers are fighting not just a handful of greedy companies and executives, but the ruling class as a whole and both its political parties. The developing strike movement of the working class, organized through rank-and-file committees, must be connected to the building of a socialist political leadership, fusing the fight against inequality and exploitation with the fight against imperialist war and the capitalist profit system.



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