

# Biden's visit to UAW picket line: A warning to autoworkers

**Eric London****26 September 2023**

Judging by the response of the UAW bureaucracy and corporate media to Joe Biden's brief visit to a UAW picket line in Michigan Tuesday, the president and ex-Delaware senator has transformed himself overnight from a longtime representative of the corporations into the greatest champion of the working class since Karl Marx himself.

As the national media ran banner headlines announcing the "unprecedented" character of the visit, Biden was greeted on the tarmac at Detroit airport by UAW President Shawn Fain and a coterie of Democratic Party politicians, including Democratic Socialists of America Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib. Fain then traveled with Biden in the presidential limousine to GM's Willow Run parts distribution center, where hundreds of UAW members are on strike. The two addressed a small, vetted crowd of UAW officials.

Biden spoke for a grand total of 87 seconds. He thanked the UAW for "saving the auto industry in 2008. You made a lot of sacrifices, you gave up a lot." Biden added, "Stick with it because you deserve the significant raises you need, and other benefits. Get back what we lost. We saved them [the companies] and it's about time they save us."

Biden speaks of "what we lost" as if he was not principally involved in forcing workers to accept a massive attack on their living standards. Biden was vice president when the Obama administration restructured the auto industry by cutting workers' wages in half, creating tiers, slashing pensions and eliminating cost-of-living adjustments. The Obama-Biden White House supported the bailout of the corporations with billions of dollars as autoworkers were losing their jobs and their homes with no government support. As a direct result of these actions, profits for the Big Three have increased 90 percent in the last decade, while workers' wages have declined by over 30 percent, adjusting for inflation.

Fain said nothing about this and instead rained praise on Biden. "For the first time in the country's history, a sitting US president has come out and stood on the picket line," Fain said. "Our president has chosen to stand up with workers in our fight for economic and social justice. It's a historic moment in time."

Fain painted Biden as a working class hero while denouncing billionaires who he said "take all the profit while workers are left to fight for the scraps and live paycheck to paycheck." The newly minted "working class Joe" notably did not applaud while Fain made his demagogic attacks on the rich.

Fain turned to him and said, "Thank you Mr. President for coming. Thank you for coming to stand up with us in our generation's defining moment. We know the president will do right by the working class. You can leave the rest to us, and we're going to take care of this business."

In concluding the event, Biden did not refer to the "working class," instead saying that "the *middle*-class built America."

After a few minutes of photo-ops and glad-handing, Biden left Michigan for the San Francisco Bay Area to host a \$100,000-a-plate fundraiser Tuesday night at the home of billionaire Wall Street investor Mark Heising.

Autoworkers must be warned: This phony stunt is an attempt by the UAW bureaucracy to prepare the ground for a sellout deal. Biden's presence was aimed at lending legitimacy to Fain and the UAW bureaucracy to shore up their ability to force through further concessions and paint it as a "victory," while concealing the full implications of what they are voting on.

Fain's praise for Biden is likewise an attempt to prop up the US president, whose flagging poll numbers are in no small part a reflection of growing rank-and-file anger across all industries over inflation and declining living standards.

Fain's presentation of Biden as someone who is "standing up with" the working class in the fight for "economic and social justice" is a shame-faced lie. While Fain criticized the auto CEOs and praised Biden, he did not mention that GM CEO Mary Barra "has visited the White House eight times since Joe Biden became president," according to a September 19 article in *Politico*, or that "the president has spent years cultivating a tight relationship with her." GM donated \$500,000 to Biden's inauguration in 2021 while Ford donated \$250,000.

The meeting of Fain and Biden in Michigan also had the character of accomplices returning to the scene of the crime: In 2009, Fain voted in support of the Chrysler contract imposing massive job cuts, plant closures, and the tier system as a member of the UAW-Chrysler National Bargaining Team—attacks on workers demanded by the Obama-Biden administration.

Fain's attempt to whitewash Biden's long record as a loyal stooge of corporate America shows that the UAW bureaucracy is working to force through new concessions. Biden's visit was heavily choreographed and timed to prepare for the announcement that a tentative agreement has been reached, possibly with Ford.

This past weekend, Ford forced through a sellout contract on 5,600 Canadian autoworkers nominally "represented" by Unifor, though Canadian autoworkers say they do not believe the vote totals. In addition, Canadian workers say skilled trades workers voted the contract down, which means that under Unifor's constitution, the agreement was rejected.

The UAW bureaucracy has called only a phony "stand up strike," which has kept production running at the overwhelming majority of assembly plants, while forcing thousands of workers on layoff and those who remain on the job to work without a contract. Only 18,000 of the UAW's 146,000 Big Three members are currently on strike.

Simultaneous to Biden's visit, the corporate media began publishing reports leaked from UAW officials Tuesday implying that a deal between the UAW and Ford may soon be announced. The *Detroit Free Press* cited "real progress at Ford" yesterday, while the *Detroit News* said there was "substantial progress," and that "conversations with Ford were 'very active' over the weekend and on Monday, according to a UAW source, though there's still work to do on a number of items."

The rank and file have no allies in the White House or UAW bureaucracy. The chief aim of the Biden

administration is to stop the developing strike movement and discipline the working class for war production as it wages war against Russia in Ukraine, and also to prepare for war with China. It is significant that Fain referred in his remarks to the fact that Willow Run was part of the "arsenal of democracy," the term used by Franklin Roosevelt and the UAW to denote the transition of US industry to war production during World War Two.

One UAW official told CNN that the UAW is in negotiations with the White House to ensure future loans to auto corporations transitioning to electric vehicles include a requirement that workers be unionized with the UAW. In other words, the UAW bureaucracy is trying to cut a side deal at the expense of the rank and file which preserves the bureaucracy's dues income while allowing the corporations to slash hundreds of thousands of jobs.

The rank and file must prepare immediately to stop this conspiracy between the Big Three, the Biden administration and the UAW-Unifor!

An all-out strike against the Big Three is required, and for this to happen rank-and-file workers in every plant must take matters into their own hands before it is too late. They must meet with one another, organize across departments and shifts and demand that locals hold immediate votes on joining the strike. A piecemeal strike can only serve to weaken workers while keeping profits flowing and strengthening the companies.

The struggle of autoworkers is part of a growing national and international struggle of the working class. Tens of thousands of UAW members at California State University are fighting against a contract with only 4 percent wage increases that expires September 30. That same day the contract for thousands of Mack Truck workers expires in Pennsylvania and Maryland. UAW members are on strike against Dometic in Pennsylvania, against ZF in Alabama, and against Blue Cross Blue Shield in Michigan. The power of the rank and file can be harnessed through the building of rank-and-file committees organized through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.



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