

UAW president pledges to send workers “to war” for Biden

Marcus Day
4 February 2024

A Biden campaign video last week revealed something significant about the role of the trade union apparatus as a linchpin in the strategy and war plans of the Biden administration. The UAW apparatus is putting its full support and resources behind a president who is rapidly escalating wars and US military operations in Europe and the Middle East, wars which are widely unpopular among workers and young people. At the same time, preparations are far advanced for war with both Israel and China.

The video highlighted the recent endorsement by UAW President Shawn Fain and Biden. Popular ire against Biden has centered on his support for Israel’s genocide in Gaza. Israel’s campaign of ethnic cleansing, carried out with US weapons and aid, has resulted in more than 27,000 deaths—the majority women and children—and horrific war crimes every day, including targeted bombings of schools and hospitals and mass starvation as a deliberate policy.

The video begins with Fain stating: “Mr. President, it’s time for us to go to war and put the power of the membership behind you. I’m looking forward to it. And we’re going to do it.”

Biden: “I’m confident.”

Fain: “I’m looking forward to it.”

Biden: “So am I.”

What is the “war” Fain is referring to? The UAW president would presumably attempt to explain away the comment as an expression of his all-out commitment to Biden’s reelection and opposition to Trump. But the remark has a simpler and more literal meaning: The UAW president was pledging to Biden to send workers to fight and die in wars on behalf of US imperialism. It was a promise to enforce brutal, war-time discipline and intensify exploitation in the factories, in order to pump out military equipment for Washington and its allies, and to produce superprofits for the corporations.

Fain’s “go to war” statement was certainly taken as literal by viewers on Instagram, with some of the most popular comments denouncing US wars in general and the US-backed genocide in Gaza in particular (notably, comments referring to Gaza specifically were censored shortly after they appeared).

At Biden’s campaign events hosted by the UAW over the past two weeks, protests against the US-backed genocide in Gaza have been forcefully suppressed. At UAW Region 1’s headquarters in Warren, Michigan, on Thursday, riot police with batons and armored vehicles faced off against pro-Palestinian demonstrators outside. At the UAW’s conference two weeks ago which formally announced the endorsement of Biden, several UAW members were dragged from the hall for shouting “Ceasefire now!” during Biden’s speech, as Fain looked on. Notably, Biden’s campaign video concludes with union bureaucrats shouting “UAW! UAW! UAW!” at the conference, as they were attempting to drown out the Gaza protesters.

The UAW’s endorsement of Biden is itself a further confirmation of the reactionary politics and pro-imperialist role of the pseudo-left Democratic Socialists of America, whose

- “President of wars.”
- “This is just sad, how could anyone want a war!!!!”
- “I’m out of words today for how much I despise this”

members occupy positions on both the UAW's executive board and among Fain's top staff. UAW Region 9A Director Brandon Mancilla—a DSA member who voted with the executive board to endorse Biden—has pathetically and absurdly sought to posture as a critic of the UAW's endorsement “process” after the fact.

The comments by Fain promising Biden that UAW members will “go to war” are the latest indication of the high-level discussions between the two over how the union bureaucracy can support the war aims of US imperialism. Last year, Fain and Biden repeatedly alluded to the World War II-era conversion of auto plants to military production, the so-called arsenal of democracy.” While presented as a shining example of union-government-corporate collaboration, the policy entailed intense speed-up and no-strike pledges enforced by the UAW—not for a struggle against fascism but rather to support American capitalism's geopolitical aims during the Second World War.

Today, however, what is being discussed between the UAW and the Biden administration would be more rightly called an arsenal of genocide. Biden is relying on the UAW and other union bureaucracies to chain the working class to the war effort, the mainstay of US imperialism, as Washington seeks to exert global domination through military force.

The UAW bureaucracy, along with its counterparts among the Teamsters and other unions, have worked systematically to prevent block strikes or keep them extremely circumscribed, as during Fain's phony “stand-up” strikes last year.

The fear by Biden and the capitalist political establishment is that any significant breakthrough by workers would trigger an uncontrollable movement for higher wages which would undermine Washington's military operations. The ruling class is doubly concerned over any signs of antiwar sentiment among workers and is counting on the union apparatus to either snuff out or divert it as swiftly as possible.

US imperialism is carrying out a war that is aimed at the working class internationally, a war which of necessity takes on an ever-more barbaric character, bringing forward all the worst horrors of the 20th century, including genocide and fascism. The war abroad requires a war at home, on the jobs and wages of workers and on vital social programs.

Opposition to war and attacks on jobs among workers is already emerging. What is necessary is to build a conscious political leadership in the working class which fuses the struggles against war and exploitation on the basis of a socialist program.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact