

Teamsters bureaucrats meet with President Biden while continuing to court Republican extreme right

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On Tuesday, President Biden met for an hour behind closed doors with the Teamsters bureaucracy, as part of the union's series of "candidate roundtables" held at its Washington, DC headquarters.

The meeting took place more than a month after an earlier roundtable with Donald Trump. This extraordinary meeting between the bureaucracy and the would-be fascist dictator was followed by a press conference in which Trump used a union platform to rail against immigrants and promote his right-wing candidacy.

For the past several months, the Teamsters apparatus has been courting the Republican extreme right. The roundtable meeting with Trump followed an earlier meeting at Trump's estate in Mar-a-Lago, Florida with Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien. The union also recently approved a \$45,000 donation to the Republican National Committee.

The meeting with Biden came as the Teamsters made numerous mutual shows of support with Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO). Hawley was one of the leaders of the January 6 coup plot to overturn the results of the 2020 election, and was one of the senators who rose to object to the certification of electoral votes while a mob led by neo-nazi militia groups assaulted the Capitol building. Hawley was photographed raising a fist in support of the crowd.

On March 6, the Teamsters published a statement endorsing an anti-China trade war bill sponsored by Hawley, the so-called "Protecting American Autoworkers from China Act." The statement falsely equated the bill's attempt to protect "domestic markets" from "domination" by the Chinese electric vehicle industry with protecting "American workers," including car haulers who are Teamster members.

Three days later, Hawley made an appearance in St. Louis on the picket line of a strike by Teamster members at Graybar, an electric equipment distributor. Hawley was warmly received by the union bureaucrats who thanked Hawley for his "support." When the Teamsters shut down the strike two days later, Hawley tweeted his "congratulations."

Little of substance was released on the Teamsters' discussion with Biden. According to news reports, comments focused on

Social Security, to which Trump has recently raised the possibility of cuts. In reality, the Democrats no less than the Republicans have been full partners in decades of attacks on Social Security and other social programs. Biden also discussed legislation, such as the PRO Act and the Butch Lewis Act, of institutional and financial interest to the union bureaucracy.

Teamsters head Sean O'Brien has said the union will likely not endorse a candidate until after the Republican and Democratic conventions in July and August. This is unusual in that the rest of the unions for the most part have already rushed to endorse Biden and the Democrats.

The Teamsters are likely hedging their bets, under conditions of explosive political crisis. There is no guarantee that either Biden or Trump will be the nominees for their parties. Biden has recently secured a majority of delegates to the party convention. But he is deeply unpopular, especially due to his administration's full-throated support for the Israeli genocide against Gaza, and there are serious concerns about his worsening physical and mental health. Polls currently show Trump would defeat Biden in a general election.

However, deeper questions are involved. The fact that the Teamsters bureaucracy are seriously courting Trump and the extreme right is the most overt expression of the ultra-nationalist, anti-democratic outlook of the entire trade union bureaucracy, which makes it a natural base of support for fascism.

It also casts light on the right-wing policies of the Biden administration itself. The self-described "most pro-union president in American history" is following a corporatist policy, using the trade union bureaucracy to discipline the working class, prevent strikes and impose the austerity measures and labor discipline needed to wage global war.

The most remarkable aspect of the developments of the past week was the complete seamlessness between the Teamsters' meeting with Biden and its courting of Hawley and the Republican right. "There's no dispute that President Biden has been great for unions, especially the Teamsters union," O'Brien declared in a press conference following the meeting.

While the Teamsters have not ruled out endorsing Trump,

they also have dutifully acted as extensions of the Biden White House. In 2022, O'Brien met regularly with Biden as the Teamsters and the other rail unions bought Washington time to ban a national railroad strike and impose a contract workers rejected.

The presidential election is taking place in the context of massive attacks on jobs, with major corporations using automation and other technology to eliminate hundreds of thousands of jobs. The aim of this corporate campaign is to beat back the rising tide of working class opposition. Last year, the number of US workers on strike quadrupled from 2022.

In endorsing Hawley's bill, the union bureaucrats are using China as a scapegoat for job losses which they themselves are helping US corporations to impose. The United Auto Workers pushed through a contract last fall, following a toothless strike impacting a small portion of production, which paved the way for the thousands of job cuts now underway. As for the Teamsters, they are silent partners in the more than 12,000 job cuts currently underway at UPS, and also forced through a sellout contract on car haulers in 2022.

In fact, whether the Teamsters endorse Biden or Trump would not fundamentally impact the union bureaucracy's policies. Hawley's anti-China agitation is in total alignment with the Biden administration, which has attacked the Chinese car industry as a supposed "national security threat" and is prepared to sign a ban on Tiktok should it pass the Senate. This is part of a systematic mobilization for war with China, upon which both the Democrats and the Republicans, in spite of the intense civil war atmosphere in US politics, are in full agreement.

As for the close alignment between the union bureaucracy and the government, the Teamsters would look to continue this policy under Trump.

Through both its partners in the union bureaucracy and through a high-interest rate monetary policy aimed at raising unemployment, the Biden administration's domestic policy is focused on preparing American society for war by disciplining the working class.

Biden's appearance at the Teamsters headquarters came less than a week after his State of the Union address. This was a warmongering speech which began with shouting about Vladimir Putin and continued into a defense of Israel and broadsides against China.

In the speech, as in much of his recent statements, Biden invoked the so-called "Arsenal of Democracy," the propaganda name for the war economy during World War II. A critical element in this was a wartime alliance between US imperialism and the bureaucracy, which enforced a "no strike pledge" against workers. This wartime alliance became permanent after the war, as the bureaucracy came to play a key function in Cold War anti-communism and in providing support for US regime change operations.

During his State of the Union address, Biden singled out

United Auto Workers president Shawn Fain as a "great friend and great labor leader." The UAW has signed on completely with the war drive, with Fain recently pledging to send the UAW membership "to war" for the president.

Even as he presents his campaign as the last line of defense for American democracy against Trump, Biden continuously appeals to his Republican "colleagues" for support for war. Biden has already all but adopted the Republican's most extreme anti-immigrant policies wholesale in a bid to secure tens of billions in funding for Ukraine and Israel. Internationally, Biden is allied with open neo-Nazis in Ukraine and the fascistic Netanyahu in Israel.

Far from being a barrier to the victory of dictatorship and the extreme right, Biden and the Democrats have consistently functioned as their political enablers. This is because their own pro-corporate policies are deeply unpopular and cannot be carried out democratically.

The biggest whopper at Tuesday's roundtable came during the post-meeting press conference, when O'Brien declared that the Teamsters membership would ultimately decide who the union would nominate. He claimed that they would only make a decision following a membership poll and a series of town hall meetings at locals across the country. In reality, this will be used as window dressing for a decision already made by the bureaucracy in accordance with its own corrupt social interests.

"Regardless of whether the Teamsters choose to endorse Trump or Biden, the interests of the working class cannot find expression through collusion between the union apparatus and either corporate party," Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party's vice-presidential candidate, said Wednesday evening. "Opposition to the jobs bloodbath and to war is deeply felt, but workers have no way to articulate this through the existing political setup."

"Joseph Kishore, National Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party, and I are running in the elections to provide workers with a program of action based on their own independent interests. The fight against war has to be rooted in the working class. But to leverage their immense social power, workers have to break out of the straitjacket of the union bureaucracy, which acts to sabotage their initiative and enforce the dictates of management and the corporate-controlled government. This is why our campaign combines a call for a mass antiwar movement with the formation of rank-and-file committees, alternative democratic bodies controlled by workers themselves, to smash the stranglehold of the apparatus and assert workers' control in the workplace."



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