

UAW President Fain dines with billionaires, warmongers at White House reception for Japanese PM

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As part of the state visit this week by Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, Biden held a lavish reception Wednesday at the White House.

The subject of the visit is incorporating Japan into American war plans against China, including integrating it into the AUKUS (Australia, UK, US) anti-China military pact. “The core of our global partnership is our bilateral defense and security cooperation under the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, which is stronger than ever,” an official US statement on the visit declared. “We affirm that our Alliance remains the cornerstone of peace, security, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.”

In plain language, two colonial powers, the US and Japan, which set the Asia-Pacific region ablaze in the 20th century, including through Japan’s invasion of China prior to and during WWII and the American wars in Korea and Vietnam, are now joining forces to reinforce their imperialist domination over the region, including against nuclear-armed China.

The imperialist aims of the visit was shown by the attendance at Wednesday’s reception. It consisted almost entirely of billionaires and warmongers. This included, in addition to leaders of the American military-intelligence apparatus, JP Morgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon, Tim Cook of Apple ...

... and United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain.

Fain’s presence was the natural outcome of the role of both Fain personally and the trade union apparatus as a whole. This is in, fact, Fain’s fifth public appearance with Biden since last November, including his presence as a guest at the State of the Union Address last month, a warmongering speech where Biden acknowledged Fain as a “great friend and labor leader.”

The Socialist Equality Party’s presidential candidate Joe Kishore wrote in a statement on Twitter/X:

Fain’s participation in the event expresses, through the ceremonial pomp of a state dinner, the Democrats’ strategy of “corporatism,” that is, the integration of the trade union apparatus into the corporate-state-military apparatus.

The immediate issue is the escalating conflict with China. As part of the preparation for war, Japan is set to join the AUKUS military pact between the US, Britain and Australia. Both the genocide in Gaza and the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine are seen by the ruling class as part of a global war that includes, centrally, a confrontation with China.

The role of Fain & Co. in the union apparatus is to discipline the working class, suppress the class struggle and back the ruling class war policy. When the UAW endorsed Biden in January, UAW members protesting the genocide were dragged away by the Secret Service as Fain stood by.

Fain said to Biden that it was “time for us to go to war and put the power of the membership behind you.” The UAW president was in fact pledging to Biden to send workers to fight and die in wars on behalf of US imperialism.

The war abroad is at the same time a war on the working class at home. The massive sums allocated to the military must be paid for through intensified exploitation and the gutting of social programs and infrastructure.

In the months before the outbreak of World War II, Leon Trotsky once observed: “In periods of acute class struggle, the leading bodies of the trade unions aim to become masters of the mass movement in order to render it harmless. ...In time of war or revolution, when the bourgeoisie is plunged into exceptional difficulties, trade union leaders usually become bourgeois ministers.”

Shawn Fain is one of the prominent representatives of this process today. His political star is rapidly rising, and a government position may well be in his near future.

But whatever the case may be, Fain has been, from the beginning, a creature of the state. A career official with no connection to the rank-and-file, he was first elevated to power under an unprecedented crisis in the UAW bureaucracy, which was both decimated by a series of corruption indictments and widely hated by the rank-and-file after decades of pro-company sellouts.

The government intervention into the UAW was designed to reinforce the control of the apparatus over the rank-and-file. Fain won election in a sham vote where more workers failed to receive ballots than actually voted, in an act of vote suppression designed to circumvent the membership and keep the election under the control of the bureaucracy.

Fain received the key support of pseudo-left groupings like the Democratic Socialists of America and *Labor Notes*, who promoted him as the beginning of a new era of democratic renewal within the bureaucracy. At the same time, they opposed the candidacy of Will Lehman, a socialist autoworker running on a platform of abolishing the apparatus.

The pseudo-left also rode Fain's coattails into the apparatus. *Labor Notes* editor Jonah Furman was hired as Fain's communications director, and several members of the *Labor Notes*-backed Unite All Workers for Democracy faction were elevated into the top leadership.

But Fain is only a representative of a broader process. In the Teamsters, Sean O'Brien was elevated to the presidency, likewise with the support of the pseudo-left. After pretending to prepare the membership for national strike action at UPS, his administration pushed through a contract last year which is now being used to lay off tens of thousands and close 200 facilities.

In one industry after another, Biden is joining forces with the union bureaucracy to impose sellout contracts, to limit or prevent strikes and to pave the way for mass layoffs. Where workers have rebelled against sellout contracts, such as in 2022 when railroaders rejected a Biden-brokered deal, he responded by banning strike action.

Meanwhile, in his speeches, Biden has increasingly referenced the so-called "Arsenal of Democracy"—in reality, the wartime alliance of US capitalism with the trade union officials to ban strikes during World War II, as the blueprint for his administration's policies. In plain language, this means funneling money away from workers to the American war machine while placing workers under military-style discipline with the support of the bureaucracy.

The pseudo-left plays a critical role in this corporatist policy. Next weekend, Shawn Fain will travel to Chicago for

Labor Notes' biennial convention. Attendees will hear not only from Fain, but major Democratic Party politicians, such as Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson.

To confuse and disrupt opposition to war, especially to the genocide in Gaza, the pseudo-left has put forward "ceasefire" resolutions in the UAW and other trade unions. The aim is to present the union apparatus as a vehicle for the fight against war even when it rubs elbows with war criminals and billionaires while dining on prime rib at the White House.

Workers must draw the necessary conclusions. "The fight of workers against corporate exploitation requires the development of a rank-and-file rebellion against the apparatus," Kishore wrote. "At the same time, the fight against war must be rooted in the industrial and political mobilization of the working class."

The fight against war and the fight against exploitation at home, he continued, are "in reality, one war." He continued: "In both fronts of this war, the union apparatus stands on the side of the corporations and the ruling class, against the workers."

He concluded:

The Socialist Equality Party campaign is devoted to developing an industrial and political counter-offensive of the working class. We call for the formation of independent rank-and-file committees in every industry, to unite workers throughout the world against the corporations and their servants in the trade union apparatus.



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