

UAW President Fain at the White House dinner: The corporatist alliance for World War III

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United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain attended a state dinner Wednesday for Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, part of a series of events aimed at escalating the economic and military conflict with China. The participation of the head of the UAW exposes not just Fain's individual rottenness, but the social function of the trade union bureaucracy as a whole.

Two years ago, Fain came to power on the false claim that he would "democratize" the UAW after federal investigators sent numerous top officials to jail for taking bribes and stealing workers' dues. Instead, following a toothless limited strike, Fain rammed through a sellout contract last year that has already cost thousands of autoworkers their jobs.

Meanwhile, as his indicted predecessors enjoyed steak and cigars at the London Chophouse in downtown Detroit, Fain dined on dry-aged ribeye in the White House alongside heads of state, billionaires like Jamie Dimon and Tim Cook, and various war criminals, including "Genocide Joe" Biden.

The fact that Fain's political star is rising as the UAW collaborates in mass layoffs is only the latest proof that the ruling class, and especially the Democrats and the Biden administration, are relying on the union bureaucracy to suppress the class struggle and ram through sellouts. The experience in auto has been repeated countless times in other industries, including at UPS, where last year's Teamsters contract is being used to lay off tens of thousands of workers and close 200 facilities.

But Fain's presence at the reception Wednesday points to an even more critical role the bureaucracy plays for the capitalist class: Helping pave the way for world war.

The purpose of the Japanese prime minister's visit was to strengthen military ties between Japan and the US and escalate his country's remilitarization. The main target of this alliance is China, whose economic growth is seen by Washington as an existential threat to US imperialist global domination. Plans for a US-led war against the world's most populous country are well advanced, with Congress "wargaming" such a conflict beginning in 2025. This would inevitably involve hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of US troops.

Fain's presence at the reception was entirely predictable. The role of the bureaucracy in the escalating global war is to discipline the working class on the "home front" so as to ensure the continued production and deployment of military equipment and to

suppress opposition from workers both to the war itself and to social austerity and heightened exploitation to pay for it.

World war has already effectively begun on the battlefields of Ukraine and the Israeli killing fields of the Gaza Strip. These are not separate conflicts, but part of a single emerging world conflict. The United States and its imperialist allies are determined to use war to strengthen their control over supply chains and natural resources.

Kishida's visit was only the latest in a series of major military escalations by the imperialist powers in the last several weeks. The French president has publicly floated the idea of deploying NATO troops to Ukraine, raising the danger of fighting between Western and Russian troops that could rapidly escalate into nuclear war. Germany, author of the worst atrocities in world history, is reviving its militarist traditions, declaring that the country has to be "fit for war" within three to five years.

The US, the cockpit of world imperialism, recently passed a record \$825 billion military budget, while it continues to funnel weapons carte blanche into Ukraine and into Israel, even as the genocide in Gaza threatens to spiral into an all-out war with Iran.

The whole of American society must be mobilized for war. Biden, who calls himself the most "pro-labor president in American history," is consciously seeking to develop a corporatist alliance, drawing together the union bureaucracy with the capitalist state and the major corporations. Announcing the new National Security Strategy in 2022, Biden boasted that his administration had "broken down the dividing line between domestic and foreign policy."

He repeatedly invokes the so-called "Arsenal of Democracy," referring to the American war economy during World War II, as the model for his own policies. In reality, a key to wartime production during the Second World War was a "no-strike pledge" enforced by the union bureaucracy to keep the explosive class struggles that had emerged during the Great Depression under wraps. This was accompanied by the jailing of anti-war socialists.

In January, when Biden accepted the UAW's endorsement for his re-election, while union bureaucrats threw Gaza protesters out of the union hall, Biden declared that it was workers who had to build the "aircraft carriers and tanks."

The UAW is helping to carry out a modern-day version of the "no-strike pledge." The union "represents" workers in key

munitions factories that are producing weapons for Ukraine and Israel. It recently forced through a sellout to prevent a strike at Allison Transmission, which makes parts for Israeli fighting vehicles being deployed in Gaza.

The drawing together of the bureaucracy with the state is not simply a preferred policy, but a fundamental tendency in the era of imperialism. In 1940, Leon Trotsky observed that, deprived by the “centralized command” of monopoly capitalism from “profiting by the competition between the different enterprises,” the unions “adapt themselves to the capitalist state and to contend for its cooperation.”

Trotsky continued:

This position is in complete harmony with the social position of the labor aristocracy and the labor bureaucracy, who fight for a crumb in the share of superprofits of imperialist capitalism.

The labor bureaucrats do their level best in words and deeds to demonstrate to the “democratic” state how reliable and indispensable they are in peace-time and especially in time of war. By transforming the trade unions into organs of the state, fascism invents nothing new; it merely draws to their ultimate conclusion the tendencies inherent in imperialism.

This is even more true than in Trotsky’s day. The bureaucrats have spent the past 40 years carrying out massive job and wage cuts while their own salaries have ballooned. They are fully creatures of the state and the corporate boardrooms.

The “America First” rhetoric of Donald Trump, which is accepted in substance by the Democrats, was pioneered decades ago by the union bureaucracy. While actively collaborating with US corporations in the wholesale destruction of jobs, the apparatus presented trade war measures, in alliance with American transnational corporations, as the means to save “American” jobs. This nationalism paralyzed workers by pitting them against their allies in the working class of different countries.

There is a historical irony to the presence of Fain at the reception for a Japanese prime minister. In the 1980s, the UAW carried out a furious racist campaign against Japanese vehicles, which led to acts of violence against Asian Americans. Today, Fain’s confederates in the United Steelworkers are backing a nationalist campaign against the merger between Nippon Steel and US Steel.

At the same time, the American trade unions are playing the role of mercenaries for US imperialism in Mexico and Latin America, helping construct new “independent” unions that are, in reality, controlled by the US Embassy. This is a continuation of its decades-long role in assisting anticommunist conspiracies by the CIA during the Cold War.

For any semblance of credibility after decades of sellouts, the modern union bureaucracy is increasingly dependent upon pseudo-left forces like the Democratic Socialists of America and *Labor Notes*. Through their support for Fain and other “reform” candidates, groupings backed by the pseudo-left have now entered

the highest echelons of the union bureaucracy.

These fake-left organizations, in reality anti-socialist and pro-imperialist, work to divert and strangle opposition to war among workers and young people by channeling it back behind the Democratic Party. Last December, the UAW passed a “ceasefire” resolution on Gaza, only to endorse “Genocide Joe” Biden just a few weeks later.

The pseudo-left as a whole is playing an increasingly key role in bolstering the credibility of all the institutions of bourgeois rule, especially the Democratic Party, as popular support collapses amid mass anger over war and staggering levels of social inequality.

Biden’s use of the phrase “Arsenal of Democracy” is also meant to drum up support for war by presenting military production as good for jobs. After all, the Second World War saw a large decline in unemployment and increase in wages in the United States.

But that was a different period for US imperialism. The US war effort—which included the internment of Japanese Americans, the use of atomic weapons and the firebombing of German civilians—was never for “democracy,” but to establish US imperialism as the leading world power. But the US at that time was still a rising power, which could afford to make certain concessions to the working class in exchange for labor peace. And there was broad opposition in the working class to German fascism, to which Roosevelt could appeal.

Today American capitalism is in terminal decline and preparing a war capable of destroying the planet. It is combining this with policies at home aimed at ramping up mass unemployment to smash the working class, with the support of the union bureaucracy. This cannot be done with any semblance of “democracy,” but can only be enforced through dictatorial, and even fascistic, means.

Above all, the corporatist alliance is aimed at suppressing the growth of socialism in the working class. Only through a mass working class movement, on the basis of socialist internationalism, can the emerging World War III be halted.

The key role of the bureaucracy in preparing the war shows that this movement is totally connected with the growing rebellion against the union bureaucracy. The development of new organizations of struggle, rank-and-file committees, prepared to fight both management, the union apparatus and the capitalist state, must be combined with a political movement against the source of war, the capitalist profit system.



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