

In *Jacobin* interview, UAW official covers up bureaucracy's support for genocide

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As the nationwide crackdown directed by President Joe Biden on students protesting Israel's genocide in Gaza accelerated this week, United Auto Workers (UAW) Region 9A Director Brandon Mancilla gave an interview with *Jacobin* magazine titled, "Why the UAW Should Stand in Solidarity With Palestine."

The article is an exercise in doubletalk aimed at obscuring the fact that the UAW bureaucracy supports war. Indeed, the headline was changed after publication from "Why the UAW Stands with Palestine" to why it "should."

Most significant is the fact that Biden is never mentioned. The UAW has endorsed "Genocide Joe" for president, and UAW President Shawn Fain is a close ally of the warmonger-in-chief. *Jacobin*, the house organ of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), also supports Biden, with editorial director Bhaskar Sunkara tweeting out his support for a "tactical" vote for him.

Meanwhile, enormous anger is building in the UAW rank and file, who are calling for strike action to stop the crackdown. A recent Twitter/X statement by Fain claiming to oppose the mass arrests was filled with replies demanding the union rescind its endorsement of Biden. Graduate students at The New School, who are UAW members, issued a statement denouncing Biden and criticizing Fain's ties with him. Local 4811, which covers tens of thousands of graduate students in California, was recently forced to announce a vote on a strike against the police crackdown. But the union is stalling for time and has yet to even announce a date for the vote.

The *World Socialist Web Site* supports the growing demand for strike action, publishing a statement this week by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which calls for a "nationwide and international strike to force an end to the assault on the basic right to free speech." It encourages UAW members, in particular, to demand that the union's entire 400,000 members, both on the campuses and in the factories, be called out.

Mancilla, a former official from the Harvard grad student union, is attempting to get out in front of the anti-war sentiment. He played a leading role in passing a UAW ceasefire resolution in December. But that resolution was a fraud, with the UAW endorsing Biden only weeks later, in a conference that Mancilla attended.

A "complicated history" of support for war

In the interview, Mancilla claims that the union bureaucracy can become a vehicle for organizing working class opposition to war. But

even in making this argument, he is compelled to admit that the UAW has a "complicated history" on imperialist war—in other words, that it has long supported it.

Not just the UAW but the entire union leadership was complicit in US Cold War foreign policy, he notes. "It's called the 'AFL-CIA' for a reason: there's a history of the US labor movement, and of the AFL-CIO and its affiliates specifically, taking stances that solidified US hegemony at the expense of solidarity with oppressed people, fighting against war and imperialism and oppression."

Mancilla treats this as though it were all some sort of mistake. At any rate, according to him, sometimes the bureaucrats got it wrong, and other times they got it right, such as when former UAW President Walter Reuther eventually came out against the Vietnam War.

In reality, the support for imperialism flows from the bureaucracy's support for capitalism, American nationalism and anticommunism both at home and abroad. It finds one of its most explicit forms in its century-long support for the Democratic Party.

Trotsky once observed that their organic striving towards "compromise" meant that "in time of war or revolution, when the bourgeoisie is plunged into exceptional difficulties, trade union leaders usually become bourgeois ministers." This is even more true than when he wrote these lines more than 80 years ago, when the bureaucrats still had some connection to strikes and social struggles. The union bureaucrats today have spent decades imposing sellouts. They are creatures of the state and management.

Mancilla even claims that the UAW's support for the "fight against fascism in World War II" was a "bold, solidaristic, internationalist" stance. In reality, the UAW bureaucracy tied workers behind US imperialism, which was fighting Germany and Japan for world supremacy, not for "democracy." A key element in the wartime regime in the US, known by the propaganda name "Arsenal of Democracy," was a no-strike pledge imposed on workers by union officials, as well as the jailing of anti-war socialists.

The war effort also involved the mass internment of Japanese Americans, the firebombing of German and Japanese cities and ended with the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

What Mancilla calls a "bold, solidaristic, internationalist" policy is being used as the model for World War III. Biden repeatedly invokes the "Arsenal of Democracy" in his speeches—declaring in his speech accepting the UAW endorsement that Americans have to be building "aircraft carriers and tanks." Fain has taken it up himself by wearing a shirt with a B-24 bomber on the front and "Arsenal of Democracy" on the back.

Dead-end calls to “pressure” Democrats

After implicitly endorsing the drive to World War III, Mancilla declares that the UAW’s ceasefire resolution is a “seismic shift” in the unions. He adds, “The UAW right now is leading the fight for social and economic justice and needs to become increasingly inclusive.” In reality, the ceasefire resolution is designed to provide the bureaucracy with cover as its support for war becomes even more open and crude.

He adds, “The next step is now pressuring our government to actually end our complicity in the genocide that’s unfolding. We have a lot of responsibility there, from the fact that we are usually [!] just hand in hand with the Democratic Party. We need to actually pressure the Democratic Party, over the fact that we also build the weapons of war.”

But the Democrats’ policy is not determined by “pressure,” but by the needs of US imperialism. Biden himself made this crystal clear in comments to the press Thursday, where he slandered protesters as violent “antisemites.” When a reporter asked if the protests had forced him to reconsider his support for the genocide, he declared simply: “No.”

The Democratic Party has long served as the graveyard of social movements, capturing them by using illusions of “pressure” in order to render them harmless. This is what makes it the premier party of war for US capitalism—having been in power during both World War I and II, Korea and Vietnam—because such huge endeavors require the “home front” be secured against domestic opposition.

Not empty, toothless “pressure,” but a break by workers and youth from the Democratic Party is what is needed. Mancilla and the UAW bureaucracy oppose this because they support capitalist imperialism.

Blaming workers for the bureaucracy’s support for genocide

Mancilla spends much of the remainder of the interview making excuses for why the UAW has refused to call strike action against the genocide. “The union movement actually does not have high density within the defense industry,” he claims. In fact, the UAW recently blocked a strike at Allison Transmission, which produces parts for Israeli armored vehicles.

The second reason the UAW has not called strikes, Mancilla claims, is “these demands [for strikes] are [not] coming from the labor movement, they’re coming from other sectors that have been advancing the call for a cease-fire and Palestinian solidarity.”

He continues: “We have yet to see a movement from within arms-manufacturing plants calling out their companies’ complicity ... Demands have to come from within, not just from the top, or from members in other sectors.”

According to Mancilla, while the bureaucracy is “leading the fight for social and economic justice,” the membership is simply too indifferent and backward to do anything. This is a cynical attempt to falsely palm off the reactionary policies of the apparatus onto workers.

Mancilla also divides workers arbitrarily across sectional and national lines, claiming calls for strikes are somehow less important because they come from graduate students or from Palestinian workers.

But even if workers voted unanimously to strike, the UAW bureaucracy would still move to block it or at least try to limit it as much as possible. The union bureaucracy regularly defies workers’ “demands from within” whenever it suits their purposes. It routinely ignores strike votes, as it did at Allison Transmission and most recently at Daimler Truck.

Even taking Mancilla at his word, this is a devastating self-indictment. If action can only legitimately come from the bottom up and “not just from the top,” then why take office as the Region 9A director, from which he draws a salary of more than \$200,000 a year?

Mancilla is a member of the ruling Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) faction, which presents the UAW as the leading force of a democratic reform movement in the unions. It also has close ties to *Labor Notes*, which virtually crowned Fain as the greatest working class leader in decades at its conference last month (which nearly broke up due to anti-genocide protests).

Within this “movement,” according to the UAWD, the role of workers is relegated to supporting one or another bureaucrat. The UAWD explicitly opposed the campaign of Will Lehman, a socialist autoworker who ran for union president against Fain. Lehman connected his call for the bureaucracy to be abolished, not reformed, with the fight against war and capitalism.

Mancilla, Fain and UAWD claimed that this showed he was unfit for office, even “anti-union.” By this they identified the union as a whole with the interests of the bureaucracy. Now Mancilla suddenly reverses himself and “rediscovers” the distinction between the membership and the tops, only so that he can transfer blame from the bureaucracy onto the workers.

At the end of the interview, Mancilla even admits that the UAW has a financial stake in the genocide through between \$400,000 and \$700,000 in investments in Israel. Again, he attempts to deflect responsibility onto others, this time the union’s money managers. “In my opinion, we should stop investing in those kinds of things [genocide],” Mancilla lamely adds.

This is a minority opinion in the bureaucracy. The week, UAW officials voted against divesting itself from these investments, which account for one one-thousandth of its total assets, according to UAW Labor for Palestine.

But even if the UAW did divest this money, it would not change the character of the bureaucracy. It is hostile and fearful of a mass movement, especially a political movement against imperialism, because it relies on “labor peace” and its ties with the government and management to secure its privileges.

In its statement Thursday, the IWA-RFC declared, “If the bureaucrats refuse” to call a strike to force an end to the police crackdown and the genocide “or try to stall for time, workers should throw them out and replace them—not with career officials, but with leaders drawn from the shop floor who are prepared to enforce the democratic will of the working class.”

Mancilla’s interview shows that this is exactly what the bureaucracy is doing. Therefore, a fight against the war also requires a rank-and-file rebellion against the apparatus.



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