

Biden appoints UAW President Shawn Fain to Export Council, labor bureaucracy enlisted in preparations for total war

Shannon Jones
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Last week, President Biden appointed United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain to the President's Export Council, a sign of the critical role of the union apparatus in preparations for total war with Russia and China.

The Export Council is a key advisory body on trade related issues. However, its deliberations are increasingly now focused on the question of preparing the "defense industrial base" for global war by strengthening supply chains, securing access to strategically critical minerals and limiting exports to geostrategic rivals of critical technology and components, such as semiconductors.

The move takes place as the UAW faces a growing threat from below. Rank-and-file autoworkers are furious over the bureaucracy's role in enforcing thousands of layoffs after last year's stage-managed "standup strike" produced a sellout contract. Tens of thousands of academic workers across the University of California system have also challenged the UAW's limit to their political strike against police crackdowns on Gaza protests.

Clearly in deep crisis, Fain announced the removal of Rich Boyer last week as the head of the union's Stellantis department. This was an attempt to deflect worker anger over job cuts and attacks on working conditions the UAW has abetted.

The nightmare that keeps both Fain and Biden awake at night is the potential fusion of mounting anger over the Gaza genocide and war with Russia and China, with opposition to the layoffs and cost cutting.

To meet this danger, and to prepare American society for war, the Biden administration is drawing together even more closely with the union bureaucracy. Fain as a leading representative of this bureaucracy has the closest ties to the White House. He was an invited guest to Biden's State of the Union speech this year and to a state

dinner for the Prime Minister of Japan. He appeared alongside Biden when the UAW endorsed him for president, while bureaucrats threw out people protesting Biden's role in the Gaza genocide.

Fain is playing a leading role in stumping for war. In a recent speech at the *Labor Notes* conference, he wore a jacket with a picture of a bomber and declared that the "Arsenal of Democracy," a propaganda term for the war economy during World War II, was the model for autoworkers to follow today. This theme was ripped out of Biden's own speeches, including his speech accepting the UAW's endorsement where he declared that workers had to make "aircraft carriers and tanks."

On the Export Council, Fain joins International Association of Machinists President Brian Bryant. They sit at the table alongside high level corporate executives and top Biden administration officials.

Both unions have a significant presence in the important defense and aerospace industries, including Boeing, General Dynamics and Lockheed Martin.

At the council's last meeting November 29, the discussion focused on "military readiness" and the measures needed to convert to a wartime economy. This included bans on the export of important technology and measures to secure supply chains. Council members discussed the importance of maintaining and expanding access to strategic materials and critical minerals as well as the "insourcing" of critical components such as semiconductors.

Emphasizing this point, Assistant Secretary of Energy Andrew Light said, "Demand growth for critical minerals is going to increase 400-600 percent over the next 3 decades ... no one in their right mind ... should not be concerned about the market concentration in critical minerals in the world today and I think we all know what

we are talking about [a reference to Russia and China]. I think no one would rightly want to see the US ... to be in the same position the Europeans were in respect to Russia on gas before the war started in Ukraine. “

Another concern for the Council was an adequate supply of labor, particularly skilled labor, to strategically critical industries such as semi-conductors.

The role of the bureaucracy in securing the supply of labor for war production is to suppress strikes and other forms of opposition, as well as to try to whip up a pro-war atmosphere by presenting war as good for American jobs.

The appointment of Fain follows the announcement by Biden in May of a new wave of anti-Chinese tariffs including a signature 100 percent tariff on imported Chinese electric vehicles. The trade moves are part of a broader drive to both suppress Chinese economic development and prepare the US economy for war.

The move was immediately hailed in an official statement by the UAW, which, along with a host of other unions, cynically claimed that the trade measures were pro-worker and aimed at defending jobs.

The UAW declared, “Making sure that major corporations have to pay a price for pitting worker against worker, pushing wages lower and lower, is a key part of a pro-worker trade policy,” read an official Solidarity House statement. “America’s autoworkers, our families, and working-class communities across this country want a trade policy that puts workers first,” the UAW asserting the anti-Chinese tariffs were “a major step in the right direction.”

A policy based on the interests of the working class, rather than US capitalism, would start with the rejection of war in defense of the profits of one’s “own” national section of the ruling class, and to unite workers in all countries in a common fight against the world capitalist system.

What the UAW falsely calls a pro-worker policy, is in fact the unity of the labor bureaucracy with the US government and American ruling class it serves to dragoon workers into World War III.

For decades, the UAW has promoted American nationalism and reactionary “Buy American” campaigns as the answer to save US jobs. Far from saving a single job, this served as cover for the UAW’s own role in helping enforce hundreds of thousands of job cuts. Its support for American nationalism also expressed the UAW’s integration with management at the US auto companies in competition with foreign-owned rivals.

The poisonous anti-Japanese nationalism promoted by

the UAW directly inspired the brutal murder of Chinese American draftsman Vincent Chin in 1982 by a Chrysler supervisor and his unemployed son.

Support for national chauvinism went hand in hand with the corporatist integration of the unions with the structure of management in order to help US auto companies compete. The result has been devastating for workers, but highly lucrative for bureaucrats like Fain, who live an upper-middle-class lifestyle in gated communities, a world totally different from shop floor workers.

To oppose the ruling class program of war and austerity workers must reject the nationalist and pro-capitalist program of the UAW and adopt a socialist and internationalist strategy. Workers around the world are linked in a global network of production and share common interests no matter where they live or what language they speak. Many are employed by the same transnational corporations.

The rational use of existing technology could provide a decent standard of living for workers around the world. What prevents that is capitalist private ownership and its nation-state system. To preserve that system the ruling classes and their trade union agents use nationalism to keep workers divided in order to weaken and undermine their struggles.

In the US this is taking the extreme form of the fascistic anti-immigrant policies of both the Democrats and Republicans and the whipping up of anti-Chinese hysteria.

The most urgent task is the unification of workers in the US, China and globally in the building of an anti-war movement that is both international and guided by a socialist strategy.



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