

US unions combine call for end to Israeli military aid with continued support for “Genocide Joe” and warmongering Democrats

Tom Hall
24 July 2024

On Tuesday, seven US trade unions sent an open letter to the Biden White House requesting it cut off military assistance to Israel, in order “to bring about a peaceful resolution to this conflict.”

The signatories to the letter are: the Association of Flight Attendants (AFA), the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT), the National Education Association (NEA), the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the United Auto Workers (UAW) and the United Electrical Workers (UE). Collectively they cover approximately 6 million workers.

The letter was sent the day before Netanyahu’s speech to a joint session of Congress, where he was for the most part received warmly from politicians by both parties, which have overwhelmingly voted in favor of billions of dollars of additional military aid to Israel.

To be blunt, the letter is a political stunt aimed at getting out in front of mass opposition, especially in the working class, in order to divert it into worthless appeals to the Democrats. Workers should not be fooled by this.

The union bureaucrats have enthusiastically endorsed “Genocide Joe” for president, and are now seamlessly transitioning to support for Vice President Kamala Harris, who is equally culpable in the administration’s war crimes. The APWU, whose President Mark Dimondstein was one of the few major union officials to oppose the war from the start, nevertheless combined a ceasefire resolution with an endorsement of Biden at its convention last week, even as Biden’s campaign was crumbling.

The bureaucrats who run the seven unions have done next to nothing to mobilize members against the war. The letter adds in passing that union officials “have spoken directly to leaders of Palestinian trade unions who told us heart wrenching stories of the conditions faced by working people in Gaza.”

But they say nothing about the appeal by the Palestinian unions for worldwide industrial action to force a halt to the flow of weapons into Israel. They have ignored this call for months, which, to the extent that workers are aware of it, they strongly support.

The UAW announced it would send a delegation to the protests against Netanyahu’s speech only two days before, ensuring nobody would even see it in time to make arrangements to participate. Posts on Twitter/X indicate less than two dozen people, out of a total membership of 1.1 million including retirees, were present.

It goes without saying that their mobilization to encourage voters to turn out for Harris will be countless orders of magnitude more aggressive.

Beneath an outward show of opposition to the war—which the letter notably does not characterize as a “genocide”—the real aim is to try to extricate Biden and the US from responsibility. “We all shared hope that the three-part ceasefire proposal you outlined in the final week of May would bear fruit, allowing for the immediate end of violence, the safe return of hostages, and the creation of a space for a lasting peace.”

But that proposal was a cynical diversion from the start, made as the US government carried out a massive crackdown on anti-war protests, shielding Israel from the International Criminal Court and resolutions in the United Nations and giving a green light to Israel for the assault on Rafah, which was then beginning. Instead, they present the continuation of the war as solely because of the Netanyahu government.

The fact that the US has been arming Israel in the first place shows that it is totally complicit in the genocide and that Israel is not acting alone, but as an agent of US imperialism. The appeal to Biden to cut off Netanyahu is akin to demanding that a mafia boss sanction one of his underlings for committing murder. It is also in line with the demands of pseudo-left protest organizers Wednesday who called on Biden to “arrest” Netanyahu.

In a statement distributed at its rally at the Capitol Wednesday, the Socialist Equality Party declared: “It is not a question of begging Congress and the American ruling class to change their policies,” but of “fusing of the fight against war with the growing social movement of the working class in the struggle for the socialist transformation of society.”

Biden’s “domestic NATO”

This is exactly what the signatories want to prevent. The unions are controlled by a bureaucracy which is totally integrated with the imperialist state. This was made clear in a visit by Biden to the AFL-CIO headquarters this month during the NATO summit, where he

called the unions “his domestic NATO.”

In other words, they are key allies in preparing society for war. This corporatist alliance with the bureaucracy, which Biden has made central to his administration’s policies, is the real meaning of his claim to be “the most pro-union president in American history.”

The occasional insincere phrases about peace do not contradict this relationship, but are an essential part of preparing the public for war. All major wars in modern US history, including both world wars and the Vietnam War, were launched by presidents who won election as the “peace candidate,” inspiring hopes which left the population politically unprepared for what happened afterward. Although the Biden/Harris White House, dripping in blood from both Gaza and Ukraine, cannot credibly posture as anti-war, the bureaucracy is attempting to build up similar illusions that they can be “pressured” to change course.

This “domestic NATO” is also an alliance against the working class at home, from whom huge resources are being robbed to fund the military. Their role in imposing massive sellouts undermines and sabotages the opposition of workers to capitalist exploitation, the only viable social foundation for a movement against war.

The UAW: A case study

The case of the UAW is illustrative. UAW President Shawn Fain is a top Biden ally, making numerous joint appearances, including at this year’s State of the Union and a reception for the Japanese Prime Minister. Biden has also appointed Fain to the Export Council, a trade-war body where the UAW head sits alongside billionaires. In public speeches, Fain has taken up warmongering themes from Biden’s State of the Union, particularly that American workers have to emulate the war economy from World War II.

In November, the UAW shut down its “standup strike,” limited to only a few auto plants, and imposed a contract which has since been used to lay off thousands of autoworkers. It was endorsed by Biden, who spoke alongside Fain.

Conscious of the growing opposition from the rank and file, the UAW apparatus passed a “ceasefire” resolution in December, only to endorse Biden in January while throwing out anti-war protesters from the hall. It then sought to limit and sabotage a strike against police crackdowns on protests by 48,000 UAW academic workers in the University of California system. It first tried to limit it to one out of 10 campuses but was compelled by a rank-and-file rebellion to eventually expand it, only to seize on a court injunction as an excuse to shut it down.

Bureaucracy in crisis

The particularly close relationship with the Biden White House explains why the bureaucrats circled the wagons around Biden when doubts arose about the viability of his campaign. Even while concerns were expressed by the party’s billionaire donors about his advanced age and mental decline, no criticism was permitted by the bureaucrats of their patron-in-chief.

But the crisis in the Democratic Party, hated and discredited among workers and youth, is connected with a crisis in the union bureaucracy. New developments have shown Fain’s administration, “elected” on the basis of mass vote suppression with the backing of the Department of Labor, is totally illegitimate, and rank-and-file autoworkers are demanding new elections. The bureaucracy has fallen into factional infighting, with each accusing the other side of responsibility for layoffs, and a federal monitor is investigating corruption charges against much of its top leadership.

The recent NEA convention devolved into chaos due to a lockout of striking union staffers, as well as its suppression of dozens of local resolutions, including one calling for the union to rescind its support for Biden due to the White House’s support for genocide.

The American Federation of Teachers convention is currently underway, where Harris is due to speak. Union President Randi Weingarten, an ardent Zionist and member of the Democratic National Committee, issued extraordinarily nervous instructions to delegates Wednesday that anti-war protests from the convention floor during Harris’ appearance would not be tolerated. “Let us morally support our sister as she is in the hall tomorrow,” she declared.

With the Democrats in crisis, a section of the bureaucracy is openly floating an alliance with Trump and the fascist wing of the Republican Party, as shown by the appearance of Teamsters General President Sean O’Brien at the Republican convention this month. Formerly hailed by the pseudo-left as the second-greatest union reformer behind Fain, he gave an “America First” speech denouncing corporations for their lack of patriotism.

The opposition among union officials and their supporters to O’Brien’s speech was focused not on the content, which they agree with, but only that he is seeking to pursue it through the Republicans rather than the Democrats.

Workers cannot pressure the bureaucracy to change its line because its support for capitalism and war derives from its social interests, just as the policies of both parties express the interests of the corporate oligarchy. A real fight in the working class against war requires a complete break with both pro-war parties, as well as a rebellion against the pro-capitalist union bureaucracy.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact