

With support for tariffs, UAW bureaucracy endorses Trump's fascist plans for war on the working class

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The United Auto Workers' endorsement of Trump's announced 25 percent tariffs on all automobiles manufactured outside the United States amounts to a declaration of support for a fascist-dominated government. It underscores the union bureaucracy's unrelenting hostility to the working class in every country—and the urgent need for a rank-and-file rebellion against it through the building of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, as part of the broader struggle against dictatorship.

UAW President Shawn Fain issued a fawning statement “applauding” the Trump administration, which he claimed has “made history” by imposing tariffs that will supposedly create “thousands more jobs.” Fain's claim that tariffs will benefit the working class is not only economically illiterate—it is a reactionary fantasy.

In a globally integrated industry, there is no such thing as an “American” or “Mexican” car. For decades, automobiles have been assembled through a vast, globe-spanning process of production. Tariffs will not protect workers; they will provoke retaliation, disrupt supply chains and trigger economic collapse and mass layoffs in the US and abroad. If not stopped by the working class, this path leads directly to trade war, as in the 1930s, and ultimately to world war.

The endorsement also reeks of hypocrisy. The UAW bureaucracy could not care less about the fate of autoworkers in the US or anywhere else. While it now claims that Trump is ending the “global race to the bottom,” it has spent the last 45 years collaborating with the corporations to destroy millions of auto jobs in the name of “competitiveness.”

Trump's aim is not to protect “American” jobs but to prepare for imperialist war to dominate global markets and supply chains. His tariff policy goes hand in hand with open threats to annex Greenland, Panama and even Canada—plans drawn straight from the playbook of Hitler, whose annexations of Austria and the Sudetenland paved the way

for World War II.

While the UAW stops short of saying it outright, the inescapable conclusion of Thursday's statement is that the union bureaucracy would support the annexation of Canada and other countries.

In a feeble attempt to provide cover for their reactionary position, the UAW bureaucrats claim that Trump's tariffs will somehow benefit Mexican autoworkers—even as thousands stand to lose their jobs. In reality, the policy lays the groundwork for the conversion of Mexico, under the thumb of American imperialism for nearly 200 years, into a de-facto colony of the US.

The UAW's support for tariffs also serves to legitimize Trump's racist scapegoating of Latin American immigrants, along with the deportation of international students. Among those targeted is Mahmoud Khalil, a UAW member and Columbia graduate student, who was abducted by ICE for his political views. The union bureaucracy has not lifted a finger to defend him—or any of the others facing repression for opposing war and genocide.

The UAW's embrace of Trump is in continuity with, and a deepening of, the bureaucracy's support for the war economy under Biden. Biden himself infamously called the unions his “domestic NATO,” highlighting their critical role in preparing the nation for imperialist war. All factions of the ruling class agree with the basic aims of Trump's policies, with Democrats only opposing his strategic refocus away from Ukraine.

The UAW pretends it can support Trump's tariffs while opposing certain other aspects of his program. On Thursday, the union issued a statement claiming to be against Trump's plans to eliminate collective bargaining rights for many federal workers. This is as absurd as claiming one could support the Nazis' demagogic attacks on “global bankers” and “disloyal industrialists” while opposing their persecution of the Jews.

The UAW's praise for Trump is part of a broader

phenomenon. As Trump wages an all-out war on the working class and social programs, the unions are doing nothing. Far from resisting the assault, they are actively facilitating it. The Teamsters are, if anything, more vocal supporters of Trump, while the entire AFL-CIO declares its willingness to “work with” the new regime. Even as Trump illegally disbands whole departments and plans to fire hundreds of thousands, the federal unions are limiting workers to letter-writing campaigns.

The working class can only organize itself through a rebellion against the union apparatus, whose income and privileged social status are based on the exploitation of the working class and the bureaucracy’s close integration with the corporations and the state.

The UAW’s support for fascism testifies to the profound transformation of the trade unions since their origins in the militant, socialist-led strikes of the 1930s. As late as 1985, autoworkers in the US and Canada were both in the UAW, reflecting what was by that time a purely formal pretense of supporting the international unity of the working class. The top leadership of the UAW is still referred to as the “International,” a terminological left-over of the left-wing sentiment of the rank-and-file in the UAW’s early days.

This transformation flows from the history and social outlook of the union bureaucracy. Steeped in anti-communism, nationalism and militarism, the bureaucrats who run the UAW and every other union were promoting “America First” long before the phrase ever passed Trump’s lips. In the 1980s, the UAW led racist lynch-mob campaigns against Japanese auto imports—culminating in the brutal murder of Chinese American Vincent Chin.

This is a global process. IG Metall in Germany, the Trades Union Congress in Britain, Unifor in Canada and other union federations are rallying around their respective national flags in preparation for war. Unifor itself emerged from a nationalist split with the UAW in 1985, based on the claim that a favorable exchange rate would allow it to defend “Canadian” jobs at the expense of American ones. This has now proven to be a fraud.

A critical role in blocking the development of rank-and-file rebellions is played by organizations like *Labor Notes* and the Democratic Socialists of America. These pseudo-left groups dressed Fain up as a democratic “reformer” during his 2022 campaign for UAW president. Not only has their so-called reformer revealed himself to be a fascist collaborator—they helped craft this policy! Former *Labor Notes* editors Jonah Furman and Chris Brooks now occupy top positions in the union, each drawing six-figure salaries under Fain’s leadership. Fain, in turn, has credited *Labor Notes* as instrumental in shaping his agenda.

These groups, which function as part of the Democratic

Party, are not “left” at all. They represent privileged layers of the upper-middle class who fear and despise the working class. They opposed the campaign of Will Lehman, a socialist autoworker who ran for UAW president on a program to abolish the bureaucracy and build rank-and-file committees, because it threatened to disrupt a new trap being set for the working class, as well as their own prospects for employment.

In the 21st century, the working class can defend its interests only through an internationally coordinated struggle. While globalization was driven in part by the ruling class’s attempt to destroy the living standards of workers, it has also produced capitalism’s own gravedigger: the expansion and integration of the working class on a global scale. This objective development lays the foundation for an historic reckoning—an international reckoning of the working class with capitalism.

This requires the building of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, which is forging new pathways of struggle independent of the union bureaucracies in every country. It is not a question of reforming the apparatus, but of abolishing it and transferring power back to the shop floor.

A powerful rank-and-file industrial movement must be developed, uniting workers in every factory, workplace, industry and country. Mass opposition, including strike action, must be prepared to counter Trump’s government of oligarchs and defend the social and democratic rights of the working class.

This development of a mass movement in the working class must be connected to the building of a socialist and revolutionary leadership. The strategy guiding the working class must not be unity with “one’s own” oligarchs, but the expropriation of the auto industry, the financial system and all major corporations, transforming them into public utilities democratically controlled by the working class. This is the program of socialism.



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