

UAW president promotes Trump tariffs, suggests auto plants be converted for war production

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In an interview on the CBS program “Face the Nation” Sunday morning, United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain doubled down on his support for President Trump’s reactionary tariff program, asserting that the fascist administration’s trade war policies would create jobs for American workers.

On April 2, a 25 percent tariff on all automobiles produced outside the US is set to go into effect, followed by a 25 percent tariff on key auto components (such as engines and transmissions) on May 3.

The tariffs will be paid by the companies importing the goods, whose costs will be passed on by sharply increasing prices on vehicles sold in the US.

When pressed by the CBS moderator, Fain insisted the UAW would continue to work with the Trump administration on tariffs despite its escalating attacks on democratic rights.

On Friday, Trump issued an executive order effectively stripping collective bargaining rights away from hundreds of thousands of federal workers. It takes place amid daily reports of abductions by the US immigration Gestapo of opponents of the Gaza genocide. Among those facing deportation are student workers, such as Mahmoud Khalil, a member of the UAW, whom Fain and the union apparatus have not lifted a finger to defend.

Fain and the UAW bureaucracy are not supporting tariffs because they believe they will somehow benefit rank-and-file workers or that they are an “exception” to Trump’s overall fascist agenda. Rather, the UAW apparatus’ promotion of tariffs is driven by its nationalist program and its unyielding support for capitalism and US imperialism.

Fain is well aware that Trump is a ruthless enemy of the working class. During Sunday’s interview, Fain admitted that Trump’s executive order targeting federal workers was “100 times worse” than President Reagan’s firing of striking PATCO air traffic controllers in 1981.

Fain repeated the lie that “unfair trade” policies were

behind the decades-long assault on auto jobs, not the capitalist system itself, which subordinates all social concerns to the drive for profit. He repeatedly scapegoated Mexican workers for taking American jobs, citing the layoff of thousands of workers at the Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant outside of Detroit, as well as threatened job cuts at Volkswagen, Mack Trucks and Volvo Trucks.

Fain’s criticism of “unfair trade laws” was also aimed at deflecting workers’ anger from both himself and the UAW apparatus, which have collaborated with the corporations over the past 45 years to destroy hundreds of thousands of jobs and close dozens of plants.

It is absurd for Fain to claim that his support for Trump’s tariffs program does not constitute support for Trump’s overall fascist agenda. Indeed, Trump’s trade war program, directed against foe and supposed allies alike, is a key component of his fascist America First project aimed at austerity and dictatorship at home and war abroad.

Underscoring the importance that the Trump administration places on the backing of the UAW apparatus, a link to Fain’s “Face the Nation” interview was reposted by the Rapid Response account of the Trump White House.

Trump’s tariff policy is not aimed at reviving domestic auto production but at preparing for World War III against the rivals of US imperialism. The tariff policy compliments the administration’s increasingly bellicose threats to seize Greenland and the Panama Canal, by force if necessary, and to annex Canada as the 51st US state.

Just as President Biden considered the trade union bureaucracy as his “domestic NATO,” Fain is offering the services of the UAW apparatus to Trump in its plans for global domination.

In Sunday’s interview, Fain made the UAW’s support for the US war machine crystal clear. Pointing to the excess capacity in auto plants Fain suggested it be utilized for expanded military production.

“You know, people forget this lesson in World War II. The

way that we formed the Arsenal of Democracy that won the war was, they took the excess capacity of all the automotive manufacturing plants in the country, and produced tanks and planes and bombs and engines and all those things. And it's no different right now. We have excess capacity. They could bring work back in very short order."

The UAW's support for US militarism is itself part of an international process, with Germany's IG Metall union apparatus itself supporting the conversion of Volkswagen plants to military production.

There is mounting anger at the UAW bureaucracy's collaboration with Trump as the dictatorial and anti-worker character of the fascist president's policies becomes ever more obvious.

A report of Fain's interview on "Face the Nation" posted on Facebook received hundreds of comments, the vast majority of them critical.

One worker wrote, "UAW does not protect its rank and file period."

Another: "Tariffs will not create one new union job. They will cost jobs. Workers cannot afford \$70K cars and will not buy them. Never trust an individual that needs to tell you 'I'll be honest with you.'"

Another commented: "NAFTA was never for working people interests but tariffs will never level the playing field, it will raise prices for the consumer. The current administration does not support raising minimum wage so where are the good paying manufacturing jobs coming from !! I think someone may have been duped."

And yet another post: "If this guy thinks DT [Donald Trump] is going to look out for the best interests of the union workers he hasn't been paying attention too closely or he's just plain stupid. At no time has DTs behavior or policies been for unions."

A Stellantis tech in the Detroit area worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*: "I can't see Fain winning another term taking that position. Sounds like 'back room shady deals' of the past. Six months ago, trump was a 'SCAB.' Now he's great because of trade policies that will surely cast the country into a recession or even a full blown depression."

A Stellantis worker at the Jeep plant in Toledo said: "Everyone is concerned because it is affecting our hours. We had an incident yesterday where they had to shut down more than once because they couldn't get some harnesses because they were having problems getting them over the border.

"It is not affecting us yet as hard as it will down the road. With Trump signing that executive order against the collective bargaining for federal workers, as far as I am concerned that is just the beginning. It will eventually make it to us in the UAW. The problem is that if people don't see

it coming until it hits them, it is too late."

Another Jeep worker said: "I'm very disappointed at Fain and nervous because this situation can cause job losses."

The UAW apparatus has for decades promoted anti-worker "Buy American" nationalism and backed tariffs during the first Trump administration.

Fain's policies are not just the product of personal cowardice and corruption but reflect the objective interests of the trade union apparatus whose six-figure salaries and lavish expense accounts are tied up with its defense of the capitalist system.

Fain's groveling before the would-be American Führer—like the support for Trump by Teamsters President Sean O'Brien—is also a further exposure of the anti-working class character of the Democratic Socialists of America, which backed Fain's election. The DSA's members continue to occupy top positions within the UAW apparatus and Fain's administration.

Workers must reject the nationalist poison spewed by the likes of Fain, echoing the fascist ravings of Trump, aimed at dividing the working class and preparing the ground for world war. The only basis for defending the democratic and social rights of the working class is through the global unification of the working class in a common fight against the corporate oligarchs.

This means building the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). Autoworkers in the US should expand the network of rank-and-file committees throughout factories and warehouses in order to carry out a coordinated struggle for jobs and democratic rights.



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