UAW president Fain and DSA-backed Senate candidate El-Sayed promote anti-China nationalism at UAW conference

Tom Hall
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United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain and Michigan Democratic Senate candidate Abdul El-Sayed delivered anti-Chinese tirades Tuesday at the UAW Michigan Community Action Program conference in Lansing. They attacked President Donald Trump from the right for saying he would permit Chinese automakers to build US plants, demanding the exclusion of Chinese-owned production in the name of "American jobs" and "national security."

The same day, AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler, American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, Bernie Sanders and former Trump adviser Steve Bannon appeared at the so-called Pro-Human AI conference in Washington D.C.. The two events expressed the growing alignment of the union apparatus, Democratic Party figures and the extreme right around economic nationalism, trade war and conflict with China.

Four days earlier, Trump told Fox News that he was open to Chinese automakers expanding production into the United States. "If China wanted to come in and open a plant to build their cars here, I'd be okay with that." Trump said, "Japan does it, but they hire our people. The big thing is they hire our people." This followed remarks made earlier in January to the same effect to the Detroit Economic Club.

El-Sayed called Trump's proposal "a huge capitulation." Adopting the standpoint of the auto executives, he declared, "If I'm the Big Three right now, I'm pissed off as hell at Donald Trump. He just pulled the rug out from underneath them." He complained that Trump had built his political rise on "defeating China" and demanded a government industrial policy to produce a $25,000 American electric vehicle that would "beat the hell out of whatever China is putting out."

Fain called Chinese-owned production "a slap in the face to America" and a national-security threat. After denouncing Chinese "slave labor," he accused politicians who condemn communism at election time of standing "at the door with their hand out" when profits were available. In effect, his charge was that Trump had failed to carry his own anticommunist program through to its conclusion.

Fain's invocation of "slave labor" is the height of hypocrisy. For nearly half a century, the UAW apparatus has collaborated in eliminating hundreds of thousands of jobs, closing scores of plants and imposing tiered wages, temporary employment and punishing schedules. Since Fain took office, Stellantis fired roughly 2,000 temporary workers and announced thousands more layoffs, including up to 2,450 at Warren Truck. General Motors and Ford have also laid off thousands at EV and battery plants, including the GM Factory Zero in Detroit. The UAW responded by issuing occasional denunciations while mobilizing no one.

The bureaucracy is reviving some of the ugliest traditions in UAW history. During Chrysler's collapse at the end of the 1970s, UAW President Douglas Fraser imposed massive concessions and joined the company's board. As jobs disappeared, the union blamed Japanese workers, promoted "Buy American" campaigns and staged the smashing of Japanese cars. This chauvinist atmosphere formed the background to the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American draftsman beaten to death by Chrysler foreman Ronald Ebens and laid-off autoworker Michael Nitz after they mistook him for Japanese and blamed him for the industry's crisis.

Republican Senate candidate Mike Rogers confirmed the agreement across the official political spectrum. "We can't let the Chinese Communist Party undercut the Big Three here in Michigan," his campaign declared.

These statements arise from the union apparatus's integration with the capitalist state for trade war and war. In 2024, the Steelworkers, Machinists, Electrical Workers, Boilermakers and AFL-CIO Maritime Trades Department jointly petitioned the Biden administration for a Section 301 investigation into Chinese shipbuilding. The UAW joined GM, Ford, Stellantis and Honda in backing legislation by Democratic Senator Elissa Slotkin and Republican Senator Bernie Moreno to bar Chinese-connected vehicles. The Teamsters endorsed related legislation against vehicles entering through Canada or Mexico. Across the unions, executives present themselves as partners of government and management in the struggle for markets, industrial capacity and military supremacy.

The three-day CAP conference was an organizational center of this integration with the state and Democratic Party. Hundreds of officials and political operatives received campaign training, endorsements and voter-mobilization assignments for candidates including El-Sayed and Jocelyn Benson. The UAW has boasted that it is engaged in "the largest electoral engagement program in decades to beat back billionaire class," yet this Democratic get-out-

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the-vote machine dwarfs anything devoted to the UAW's own ongoing election. Only about 9 percent of eligible members voted in 2022; roughly 106,790 ballot packages were returned by UAW members, while more were undeliverable than were cast.

Fain served as an ex-officio member of the cabinet of Joe Biden, who appointed him to the President's Export Council. Fain invoked the World War II "arsenal of democracy" and called for a "domestic NATO" uniting government, corporations and unions behind American industrial expansion.

The taking of power by the fascistic Trump administration did not end this relationship. In March 2025, the UAW welcomed Trump's "aggressive action" on tariffs and announced "active negotiations" with his administration of tariffs on autos and heavy trucks. Fain recently boasted that the UAW is in regular discussions with the administration on tariffs. Fain's denunciations express the bureaucracy's bid for an even bigger "seat at the table" in Trump's trade-war and great-power policies.

The UAW's 2026 trade white paper called for a corporatist framework to assert US domination over the North American car industry, including production-to-sales requirements for automakers, tariff revenue to finance the union apparatus in Mexico, and a commission of union, government and industry representatives to reorganize continental supply chains. It praised Robert Lighthizer, an anti-China hawk and architect of Trump's first-term tariff policy.

El-Sayed's program calls for "targeted, smart tariffs," federal support for selected industries and a "significant voice" for unions in economic decisions. His declaration, "If I'm the Big Three right now, I'm pissed off as hell," shows that he adopts the class standpoint of the auto corporations, demanding protection for profits against Chinese rivals.

The Democratic Socialists of America backed El-Sayed, though he is not a member. He is one of many DSA members or DSA-backed candidates to win primaries this summer. But while the growing support for the DSA expresses a move to the left and hostility to capitalism, the DSA itself is a pro-capitalist faction of the Democrats whose role is to corral and disorient this radicalization. Three of its four House members voted in 2022 to outlaw a rail strike and impose a rejected contract. Every DSA-backed House member voted that year for $40 billion to arm Ukraine—a war that El-Sayed also backs. DSA member and New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani met twice with Trump at the White House and pledged cooperation on common interests. At the September 11 memorial he shook hands with Rudy Giuliani, an architect of Trump's attempt to overturn the 2020 election and the January 6 coup.

Fain himself was brought to office with the support of the DSA and Labor Notes milieu through Unite All Workers for Democracy. They rejected Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman as "anti-union" because he called for abolishing the bureaucracy and transferring power to the shop floor. Their operation confronts a mounting revolt. Earlier this year, Nexteer workers rejected three contracts by 96, 73 and 55 percent and voted 86 percent to strike; Dana workers rejected deals by 90 percent or more; Bridgewater workers voted down another; and 10,000 Deere workers rejected a two-year extension.

Lehman's campaign gives this movement its most conscious expression. After winning 4,777 votes in 2022 despite ballot suppression, he is again running to abolish the bureaucracy, transfer power to the rank and file and unite workers internationally.

The trade war against China is bound up with preparations for a shooting war to eliminate US capitalism's principal economic competitor. The bureaucracy supports this drive, presenting the conversion of industry to weapons production as a jobs program. In March 2025, Fain cited the World War II conversion of auto plants to produce "tanks and planes and bombs and engines" and said the same unused capacity existed today. GM Defense is now working with Lockheed Martin to manufacture housing components for PAC-3 Missile Segment Enhancement interceptors. Union bureaucracies in the United States and Canada demand government support for weapons work in the plants they administer. Their bid for a seat in industrial planning encompasses the mobilization of production and workers for war.

This course flows inevitably from the bureaucracy's nationalist framework and defense of the profit system that sustains its privileges. It identifies workers' interests with "the nation," blames foreign workers, and accuses "globalist" elites of disloyalty to American capitalism. Claims to oppose oligarchy become support for the American oligarchy's struggle against its rivals. The bureaucracy thereby subordinates workers to the corporations that exploit them and the state preparing catastrophic conflict with China.

Workers in the United States have no interest in defending GM, Ford and Stellantis against Chinese manufacturers, and Chinese workers have no interest in the ambitions of the Chinese ruling elite. The answer to tariffs, industrial mobilization and war is the unity of workers in the United States, China, Mexico, Canada and throughout the world against every capitalist government. This requires a rebellion against the nationalist union apparatus and the building of rank-and-file organizations in every workplace, and the development of a mass movement of the working class based on socialist internationalism and the common class interests of workers everywhere.

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