In post-election press conference, Trump hails UAW, Teamsters support for his trade wars

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Donald Trump singled out United Auto Workers (UAW) President Shawn Fain and the Teamsters for praise at a White House press conference last Friday, boasting falsely that tariffs were bringing industrial production back to the United States. He declared: “They were stolen from us. They were stolen by other countries from Germany to Japan, South Korea, Canada, Mexico. They’re all coming back at numbers that nobody’s ever seen before.”

This is a lie. US motor vehicle and parts employment fell from 975,500 when Trump took office in January 2025 to 965,500 in October 2026. It had already fallen from 1,027,600 in December 2023 under Biden following mass layoffs after the ratification of the UAW’s new Big 3 contracts. Meanwhile, tariffs and the war against Iran have been born overwhelmingly by the working class in the rising cost of living.

Trump claimed Ford had been preparing to close an unnamed old Detroit-area plant in 2024, only to postpone the decision until after the election. Now, he asserted, it was running “round the clock seven days a week.” He then declared: “That’s why the auto workers like Donald Trump. That’s why Shawn Fain called me the other day to thank me.” Fain, he added, was “a radical Democrat,” but “the auto workers have been great. The Teamsters have been great.”

The press conference sought to explain away the Republicans’ midterm debacle, in which Democrats won their largest majority since 1992, and won 56 seats in the Senate. Trump insisted the Republicans would have won had he been on the ballot, blaming the party for failing to publicize his “achievements.”

These claims fly in the face of the election results. Eighty-nine percent of voters cited the cost of living as a major or crucial factor, while roughly 70 percent said the economy favors the wealthy. Gallup found record favorable views of socialism at 43 percent, including 57 percent among adults aged 18–34, compared with 43 percent for capitalism.

The UAW did not confirm whether Fain made the reported call to Trump. But Trump’s invocation of the UAW and Teamsters to justify his trade war aligns completely with the UAW’s open embrace of tariffs and the union bureaucracy’s overtures to become a corporatist ally in American capitalism’s economic warfare abroad, the militarization of society and attacks on workers at home.

Teamsters President Sean O’Brien openly embraces the Republican right, having spoken at Trump’s 2024 convention and hosted far-right politicians on his Better Bad Ideas podcast. Fain remains with the Democrats, maintaining a pose of independence and semi-opposition to Trump. But the substance of the policies in both unions is to sabotage struggles by the working class against the companies.

The UAW ended a strike by 2,600 Harvard faculty and researchers without a contract, isolating an ongoing strike by thousands of graduate students. Earlier this year, it imposed a fourth agreement at Nexteer after three rejections. At UPS, management is eliminating nearly 78,000 operational positions across 2025–26, since the Teamsters blocked a national strike and secured passage of a new contract in 2023.

Since the election, union officials have joined leading Democrats in calling for “bipartisan” collaboration with Trump. At a November 4 press conference, the day after the midterms, Fain acknowledged that “People aren’t voting Democrat right now because they believe in the platform,” but because of popular anger over social conditions. He warned that Democrats who failed to deliver would serve only one term. Yet his answer to this was collaboration with Trump on economic policy.

Fain reiterated his support for the basic premise of Trump’s trade war, calling instead for “strategic and selective” tariffs. He criticized measures against Canada expressed hope that Democrats would work with Trump to remove “the stupid tariffs that make no sense” while retaining measures protecting US production. Fain’s supposed concerns about the plight of Canadian and Mexican workers are entirely hypocritical.

He has boasted about the union’s close collaboration with the Trump administration in crafting tariffs on autos and heavy trucks and hailed Stellantis’ decision to shift Jeep production from Canada to the US, which has led to the closure of the Brampton, Ontario plant and the wiping out of thousands of jobs. The UAW’s trade white paper published this year calls for production-to-sales quotas that would devastate Mexico’s export-based auto industry.

Fain’s disagreements concern the targets and management of the trade war, above all against China. He has repeatedly welcomed tariffs since Trump’s return to office, saying in March 2026 that “strategic, targeted tariffs are an important tool” to bring production to the United States.

He also took credit for the election of Michigan Democrat Abdul El-Sayed to the Senate. “Our members went to bat to make Abdul our next senator, and he won,” he said. He boasted of the biggest

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electoral mobilization by the UAW in more than a generation, including more than 500,000 telephone calls, 100,000 doors knocked and over $3 million in political action committee spending. El-Sayed also immediately began calling for working with Trump.

But only weeks earlier, rank-and-file autoworkers boycotted the election for top UAW officers in what was the lowest turnout in any national union election in US history. Although the corporate media and Democratic Socialists of America-aligned publications like *Jacobin* and *Labor Notes* hailed the election as a "mandate" for Fain, only 98,029 of roughly 1.1 million eligible members cast ballots—8.9 percent. Fain received 66,166 votes, barely 6 percent of the membership.

The apparatus made five times as many campaign calls for Democrats as the number of members who voted in its own election. Nearly 2,000 voted for socialist autoworker Will Lehman, who called for abolishing the apparatus's control and transferring power to rank-and-file committees.

The Democratic Party was the initial beneficiary of the electoral defeat of Trump and the Republicans but workers and young people are far to the left of this party of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus and a collision is inevitable. Inside the UAW, this radicalization took the form of mass abstention, expressing distrust and hostility toward the apparatus.

It is also being expressed in the growth of the class struggle on an international scale. Mexican truckers have blockaded highways to protest police corruption and attacks by Trump on Mexican and immigrant truckers, and the struggle of Mexican healthcare workers is developing into an open confrontation with the union bureaucracy. Across Europe, hundreds of thousands have marched and struck against austerity and war, including mass strikes in France and Italy. These struggles foreshadow major class battles in the United States.

The bureaucracies fear this development because it threatens their privileged social positions. Long ago transformed into industrial police forces, they help corporations impose layoffs and concessions and suppress workers' resistance. Their six-figure salaries, corporate connections and political influence depend on this role. Their decades of nationalism and anti-communism express their class hatred of the workers and bring it into alignment with Trump.

Decades of UAW scapegoating of Japanese and other foreign workers saved no jobs, but split workers against each other in the face of attacks by transnational corporations. The union helped the companies cut hundreds of thousands of jobs in the 1980s, imposing billions in concessions in the name of "competitiveness" while blaming the losses on Japanese competition. In 2009, it accepted the halving of starting wages in exchange for billions in GM and Chrysler shares and seats on corporate boards.

Since taking over the UAW apparatus in 2023, Fain has deepened the corporatist collaboration of the union with the corporations and the both capitalist parties, and offered the services of the bureaucracy to block resistance to the automation-driven layoffs and the transformation of US industry for world war. On November 11, the UAW issued a letter urging congressional leaders to keep the House Select Committee on China in place when Democrats take control and push for a permanent statutory ban on Chinese automakers before the year ends.

O'Brien has joined this anti-Chinese campaign and supports legislation to bar the country's more advanced and lower-costing vehicles from the US market. "China is aggressively trying to enter the American market so it can undercut American workers, eliminate good union jobs, and weaken our manufacturing base," O'Brien claimed.

The Teamster president's nationalist appeals accompany open anti-immigrant agitation. Speaking with Republican Senator Josh Hawley, he complained about undocumented immigrants who allegedly come to America to "commit crimes and steal jobs." In the midterms, he endorsed Trump-aligned Republicans even as their party suffered a sweeping defeat.

The DSA and the union "reform" groups it supports are directly implicated in the nationalism of the apparatus. Teamsters for a Democratic Union helped elect O'Brien in 2021 and supported his "re-election" without a membership vote this summer, even after his ties to the far right emerged in the open. *Labor Notes* and Unite All Workers for Democracy brought Fain to power; their DSA-linked personnel took highly paid positions in an administration now facing renewed corruption allegations.

DSA politicians themselves, together with Bernie Sanders, are among the most prominent advocates of collaboration with Trump. Sanders called cooperation "worth the effort." New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani, a DSA member, has met Trump three times. At the November 18 *New York Times* DealBook Summit at Lincoln Center—an annual gathering of leading corporate and financial executives—Mamdani said that he and Trump "both love the same city." Despite continuing to call Trump a fascist, Mamdani explained that in dealing with the president he chooses to "focus on any possible area of commonality." He praised Trump as New York's "most famous developer" and presented their working relationship as a model of practical politics.

The eruption of struggles internationally will bring workers into ever more open conflict with the apparatus. Its organized alternative is the development of rank-and-file committees and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, through which workers can assert their own power independently of both capitalist parties and the pro-management union officials. International unity against the transnational corporations and the profit system is precisely what the union bureaucracy fears above all.

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