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As opposition grows to sellout auto contracts, Biden and Fain hold “back to work” rally



President Joe Biden speaks to United Auto Workers at the Community Building Complex of Boone County, Thursday, Nov. 9, 2023, in Belvidere, Ill. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)

As thousands demonstrated against Joe Biden’s support for Israeli genocide in Chicago Thursday, Biden and United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain held a joint rally two hours away, in Belvidere, Illinois, to promote the sellout contract agreed to last week by the UAW bureaucracy and the Big Three auto companies.

The UAW-Biden event shined a light on the two-front war that the US ruling class is waging around the world.

Fain and Biden had nothing but praise for each other and for the tentative agreements, which maintain the hated tier system, block the rollover of “part-time” temporary workers,

fail to make up for decades of falling wages, and pave the way for massive job losses through the switch to electric vehicles.

Spinning this sellout as a victory, Fain thanked Biden for “the support shown by the White House throughout this fight,” adding that “now we move on.” Biden returned the compliment to Fain, saying: “You’ve done one hell of a job,” praising the contracts as “historic” and “game changers.”

In presenting the contracts as done deals, both Fain and Biden forgot one minor detail: the rank and file.

Neither mentioned that the vast majority of the nearly 150,000 Big Three workers have not voted on the contract yet, or that major plants that have voted have voted down the contract in recent days, including GM Flint Assembly, Romulus Powertrain, Marion Stamping, and Pontiac Stamping/Powertrain.

The entire establishment holds workers’ most basic democratic rights in total contempt. Fain and the UAW leadership shut down all the strikes at the Big Three and ordered workers to return before they had even seen the tentative agreements. As if there was any doubt of their aims, organizers at the Chicago rally hung a banner behind the speakers which read: “Auto Workers Back to Work.”

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Never before has a sitting US president been as closely involved in pushing for the ratification of a labor contract as Biden has been with the UAW. Writing of the auto talks, *Politico* reported that “Biden himself was briefed daily on them, even after the war broke out in Israel.”

The US government—the executive committee of the American ruling class—views the suppression of the class struggle as essential to its war aims abroad. There are several reasons for this.

First, the ruling class views the autoworkers’ struggle—and any workers’ struggle—as a threat to the global financial position of corporate America, already destabilized by record levels of debt that further undermine the role of the dollar as the world’s chief currency. Wall Street’s solvency and its ability to dominate the world market depend on the ever

more intense extraction of surplus value from the working class in the US and internationally.

Second, US imperialism views the suppression of the class struggle domestically as a military necessity. Biden addressed the nation last month to demand an additional \$105 billion in spending for the US-led war against Russia in Ukraine and the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza. In so doing, he called for a return to a level of wartime production not seen since World War II, to “replenish” stocks of equipment and weapons.

Pentagon spokespersons routinely complain to the media about the difficulties in producing sufficient weapons and equipment for all of America’s wars, especially in the run-up to their plans for war with China. In his speech in Belvidere, Biden spoke of the need to develop a domestic electric vehicle industry to counter China, saying, “My administration will continue working to make sure the UAW has everything it needs to outcompete China and everyone else in the world.”

Third, the ruling class is deeply concerned about the political radicalization of the working class and views every social struggle as a potential threat to the continued existence of the capitalist system. The Biden administration and corporate-media establishment have denounced pro-Palestinian protesters as antisemitic, and White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre even compared them to neo-Nazis. The US Congress censured Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib for using a pro-Palestinian slogan, in an attempt to intimidate all pro-Palestinian speech, while many imperialist governments throughout the world have banned protests outright.

But mass opposition to the multi-front wars of the US ruling class—which are waged against the world’s working class—is erupting to the surface.

The sordid role of the UAW bureaucracy in the suppression of social opposition to war was on display during Biden’s speech in Belvidere. When Biden began to speak, he was interrupted by a protester who demanded a ceasefire, shouting, “10,000 Palestinians have been killed, there is a genocide happening in Gaza!” The UAW bureaucrats in attendance began booing, shouting, “Throw her out!” and “This isn’t the time for that.” They sought to drown out the anti-genocide protester with chants of “We love you, Joe!”

As the UAW bureaucracy cheered for Genocide Joe in Belvidere, thousands demonstrated in Chicago in support of the people of Palestine. Protests were called in anticipation of Biden’s visit to the city Thursday evening for a fundraiser hosted by multi-millionaire bipartisan megadonor Glen Tullman. After declaring himself a friend of “workin’ people”

in Belvidere, Biden passed the hat among Chicago's super rich at an event that cost \$3,330 to attend and \$200,000 to "co-host."

The White House and UAW bureaucracy will not succeed in their desperate efforts to create popular support for their actions. Support for Biden is cratering, and calls are growing even among Democrats to remove him from the ticket in 2024. Fain was elected in a fraudulent election where he won votes from just 3 percent of the rank and file.

Rank-and-file UAW autoworker Will Lehman has received an overwhelming response to his demand that the UAW cease production of military equipment going to Israel, with full pay for all affected workers. A video Lehman posted of his appeal received hundreds of thousands of views, with thousands of workers and young people leaving comments of support.

Though several UAW plants make equipment and munitions for the Israeli military, Shawn Fain has refused Lehman's call. He made no reference to the ongoing slaughter in Palestine when he praised Biden as a working class hero on Thursday. In a statement issued before the rally, Lehman said:

Fain's actions, and the actions of the entire UAW leadership, have been to continue supporting Joe Biden and to keep production running as bombs and missiles "made in the USA" continue to rain down on the defenseless people of Gaza. I condemn this cowardly silence from the bureaucrats who run the UAW and all other major US trade unions. Their silence shows the entire AFL-CIO bureaucracy has completely integrated itself into the imperialist Democratic Party, with devastating results for workers in the US and internationally...

If there is to be action, it must be organized and prepared by us, the rank and file, both in the UAW and beyond, on an international scale. Past antiwar movements, led by the privileged upper-middle class, have been subsumed into the Democratic Party, the graveyard of social movements. This antiwar movement must be based in the working class, the social force capable of bringing imperialist war and capitalist exploitation to an end.

This appeal is also garnering mass support. Workers and young people regardless of where they are employed can join the rank-and-file movement and become a part of the fight to unite workers against imperialism, corporate exploitation and the pro-imperialist trade union bureaucracies by filling out the form below.

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