

On behalf of Biden administration, UAW bureaucracy and DSA struggle to contain anti-war sentiment

Eric London
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The Democratic Party is relying heavily on the UAW bureaucracy and Democratic Socialists of America to protect Joe Biden, insulate his re-election campaign from growing hostility to the genocide in Gaza and keep weapons flowing to both Israel and Ukraine in the US-NATO war against Russia. But the growth of political opposition to the genocide, including among tens of thousands of student and academic workers who are UAW members, is throwing the state and the bureaucracy's best laid plans into disarray.

Amid growing working class anger over layoffs, speedups and unsafe conditions at auto plants across the country, this week's strike vote by 48,000 student workers at the University of California over the violent police crackdown on anti-genocide protestors—orchestrated by Democratic state and local officials with the support of the Biden administration—raises the need for an independent rank-and-file strategy to mobilize the entire working class against war, job cuts and corporate exploitation. Anything less will give the DSA, bureaucracy and Democratic Party space to suppress the emerging struggles and direct them behind Biden's re-election campaign.

After forcing through a sellout contract and keeping the majority of Big Three autoworkers on the job during last year's bogus "stand-up" strike, the bureaucracy has prepared the way for massive layoffs and the transformation of the auto industry to place it on a war footing.

As these attacks on workers' living conditions have generated deepening opposition, the UAW bureaucracy—led by DSA-backed President Shawn Fain and staffed by DSA members and supporters like Communications Director Jonah Furman, strategist Chris Brooks and Region 9A Director Brandon Mancilla—is engaged in an effort to prevent a rebellion, promote the Democratic Party in the 2024 election and support the Biden administration's imperialist foreign policy.

Fain and the DSA network running the UAW have proven loyal foot soldiers for Biden. The UAW has kept production running at facilities that produce military equipment for Israel and Ukraine, rejecting calls by rank-and-file socialist candidate for UAW President Will Lehman to shut down production with full pay for all workers.

In January 2024, Fain formally endorsed Biden as the US-backed Israeli regime intensified its scorched-earth campaign against Gaza. He then applauded the president as an honored guest at Biden's February State of the Union address. Last weekend, Payday Report noted that the UAW's International Executive Board voted against a modest "divestment" provision that would have required the bureaucracy to decouple its massive slush fund from Israel and corporations complicit in the genocide in Gaza. (Furman did not reply to a WSWs request for comment on the divestment vote.)

The Biden administration views the UAW bureaucracy as necessary to advance its war aims and, relatedly, Biden's re-election. The *Washington Post* wrote in April that Fain "could be Biden's secret weapon in Michigan" and that the UAW is necessary "to reach many voters who might otherwise stay home" because "Biden is struggling to connect with voters because of higher prices and Israel's destructive war in Gaza."

The *Post* then quoted Fain, who is careful to present himself as though he has the president's ear: "One of two people is going to be president of the United States in this upcoming election. And obviously the other candidate would be a complete disaster, not just for labor, but for the situation in Gaza. We talk to the president quite often and his staff about our concerns in Gaza and that there needs to be more action. And we're going to continue to do that."

Fain's presentation of the Biden administration as susceptible to popular pressure is a lie. When a reporter asked Biden earlier this month if the protests had forced him to reconsider his support for the genocide, he said: "No."

But the *Post* acknowledged that Biden is reliant on Fain's attempt at political plastic surgery. "Some Democratic strategists say Fain could even help Biden with discontent throughout the party over the administration's handling of the Israel-Gaza war, a special cause for concern for Democrats in Michigan, which has a large Arab American population." Biden's campaign manager Julie Chavez added, "We're proud to have earned UAW's support, and we join them in their mission to hold corporations accountable."

Just as Fain and the bureaucracy promote a lying version of Biden, the administration and Democratic Party likewise cultivate a version of the UAW bureaucracy that clashes with the experience of its membership. The UAW long ago stopped "holding corporations accountable," as Biden's campaign manager claimed.

On the contrary, the bureaucracy helps the corporations impose exhausting and dangerous working conditions and restrains the membership from fighting back. Nearly the entire past leadership of the bureaucracy was indicted for systematically robbing its membership of dues and accepting bribes in exchange for ramming through sellout contracts. Forced by a federal court monitor to hold direct elections for UAW leadership, the bureaucracy massively suppressed the vote, leading to a record-low turnout of 9 percent, resulting in the election of Fain.

When Fain came to office, he protected the corrupt bureaucracy and brought in a slew of DSA members, who acquired top positions with salaries well over \$100,000 a year. Their chief role has been to

rehabilitate the UAW bureaucracy and present it as having been reformed, so that it can better perform its services supporting the Democratic Party.

As the UAW bureaucracy forces through layoffs, maintains the hated tier system and oversees dangerous conditions like those at Warren Stamping near Detroit (where another strike vote is being held this week), DSA-aligned publications like *Jacobin* magazine regularly promote the longtime bureaucrat Fain as a revolutionary and have defended all the UAW's recent betrayals, including the bogus "stand up" strike in 2023, the suppression of the UC strike in 2022, as well as struggles at Lear, Dana, General Dynamics, Volvo, Mack Truck, John Deere and elsewhere.

The outbreak of student protests against the genocide and the police crackdown has generated outrage among students and academic workers, tens of thousands of whom are UAW members at campuses that have been centers of opposition to the genocide, including Columbia University, The New School and the University of California. Biden issued an endorsement of the police crackdown and has denounced student protesters—many of whom are Jewish—as "antisemites." This movement coincides with growing anger among autoworkers over the lasting impact of the 2023 sellout.

The police crackdown provoked deep anger over the UAW leadership's support for Biden, threatening to explode the bureaucracy and Democratic Party's strategy. A group of rank-and-file UAW members at The New School in New York City issued a statement denouncing Fain for endorsing Biden.

Following last week's announcement that the UAW leadership rejected a resolution divesting from Israel, members took to Twitter to express opposition to Fain and the bureaucracy's support for Biden and the genocide. "If this is how the UAW leadership will deal with the divest vote at UC UAW then they should be threatened with having 40k less due-paying grad [student members]," wrote one member. "Shame on UAW and Shawn Fain, calling for a ceasefire means nothing if you take no action," wrote another.

In an interview with *Jacobin* in early May, UAW Region 9A Director Brandon Mancilla attempted to head off opposition to war and channel it behind the Democratic Party. He recalled favorably when the UAW helped American imperialism build an "arsenal of democracy" in the Second World War and encouraged readers to "pressure our government" and "pressure the Democratic Party over the fact that we also build the weapons of war." Mancilla parrots the line of DSA members in Congress, including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who praise Biden, denounce socialist criticism of the administration and provide critical votes for Israel's Iron Dome and the arming of Ukraine.

Violence against student protesters and UAW rank-and-file members in California last week, which included the police-sanctioned, right-wing attack on protesters at UCLA, immediately led to widespread calls for a walkout of students and academic staff across the UC system, the largest in the country with 300,000 enrolled students.

Local 4811 was forced to respond by agreeing to a strike authorization vote scheduled for May 13-15, an attempt to postpone further action until the start of the summer break. The UAW leadership is particularly concerned about the political radicalization among this section of student workers.

For this reason the bureaucracy placed particular emphasis on suppressing the vote among UC workers in the 2022 UAW presidential election—with turnout between 2 and 5 percent. Despite

this, socialist candidate Lehman received roughly 15 percent of the vote.

The fact that the bureaucracy was forced to call a strike vote raises critical questions for student workers and rank-and-file workers everywhere. To the extent the protest movement remains isolated on the campuses, it will be suppressed and channeled into the Democratic Party.

The DSA, which functions as a faction of the Democratic Party, is preparing an active intervention in the UC student strike vote to better suppress the struggle and limit opposition to Biden. On May 9, the DSA issued a statement praising Local 4811 for holding a strike vote and acknowledging that the local "has the highest concentration of DSA members of any union in the country."

As the Democratic Party prepares to crush the struggle of the rank and file, it is absolutely critical that the protests orient to the working class, including industrial autoworkers, to root the struggle against imperialism and genocide with the fight for social equality.

On Thursday, Lehman issued a statement on the strike titled "For a UAW-wide strike against the political attack on campuses! Autoworkers must defend the right to protest!" The statement appeals to workers across the UAW and beyond: "We, as the working class, have to support the students. Corporate politicians won't listen to reason. The only way to stop the war and defend our rights is by taking matters into our own hands as the working class, who create all of society's wealth."

Lehman said, "Workers are furious at the UAW's treachery. There are growing demands in particular for them to rescind the endorsement of Biden. Grad students are also angry over the role of Local 4811 officials in allowing police into the UCLA encampment. The bureaucrats play the same role on every picket line, enforcing whatever the police and the courts tell us we're not allowed to do."

Bringing the power of the working class to bear requires the development of new democratic structures—rank-and-file committees—controlled by workers and not beholden to the bureaucracy, the Democratic Party or Wall Street.



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