

# In podcast interview, Bernie Sanders boosts embattled UAW president and Biden surrogate Shawn Fain

Jacob Crosse, Tom Hall  
21 June 2024

On June 12, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders posted on his social media accounts an over half-hour long edition of the “Berniecast,” featuring an interview between himself and president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) Shawn Fain.

What is perhaps most significant about the interview is what was not said. It was published less than three days after a federal court-appointed monitor in charge of overseeing the scandal-ridden UAW revealed it was investigating Fain, UAW Secretary-Treasurer Margaret Mock and an unnamed regional director over corruption and obstruction allegations.

In addition to arriving in the wake of the monitor’s bombshell report, the interview was posted the same week UAW Local 4811 called off a strike by thousands of University of California academic workers, following a court injunction.

None of this was mentioned in the interview. Nor was the Biden White House’ role in the genocide in Gaza and the crackdown on protests. This is because it would cut across the main purpose of the interview, which was to counter the growing hatred felt by workers and youth to the Democratic Party and the union bureaucracy.

They attempted to paper over this reality through continuous lying. Sanders began the interview by praising Fain for the “extraordinary role not only in fighting for his own members...but also I think showing the American people in general what trade unionism is about and how unions could fight to improve life for all Americans.”

## Promoting mass layoffs

Sanders asked Fain to “talk a little bit” about “what you’ve accomplished.” As an example of “an amazing victory” Fain and the UAW allegedly achieved for workers, Sanders offered the contracts at the “the big three auto companies.” These contracts were imposed after limited so-called “standup strikes” designed to wear down workers.

They also received the endorsement of President Biden, who appeared alongside Fain at a “back to work rally,” where the UAW shielded him from thousands of anti-genocide protesters.

These “victories” are in fact sellouts that have led to thousands of job losses. Fain, UAW Vice President for Stellantis Rich Boyer and

others concealed the fact that companies would eliminate thousands of jobs when they falsely told workers they were “historic” victories.

Fain was unable to speak concretely about anything the UAW supposedly “accomplished.” Instead, he rambled incoherently: “Our strike when I became president—look, I really felt like you had radical change in this union and what we did, and so we really brought in some new people combine that with some people that were existing, and revamped how we were going to go about doing things.”

Sanders claimed to be “surprised” that when the negotiations began, “there were new workers at these Big Three making ... 17, 18 bucks an hour?” Fain replied that in 2007 “a new worker would start at \$19.50 per hour...fast forward to 2019...12 years later the starting rate was \$18.04...it actually went backwards.”

Sanders’ shock was entirely for show. He knows perfectly well that the Democratic Party is responsible for these poverty wages, especially through the Obama-era bailout of the auto industry which cut starting wages in half. As for Fain, as a top official for many years, he was also responsible for “negotiating” these cuts. In fact, later on in the interview, Fain specifically singled out the Obama-era bailouts for praise.

## No explanation for collapsing support for Democrats

But the most significant point in the interview came when they turned to the presidential election. Sanders asked Fain why workers no longer looked upon the Democratic Party as the party that will “help them more” than the Republicans. He nervously acknowledged that people “are less than enthusiastic about the Biden campaign.”

Any genuine socialist or workers’ leader would welcome the growing hatred towards the Democrats, and use it as the opportunity for an independent, anti-capitalist program within the working class. But this is what terrifies Sanders and Fain, who function as PR men for this Wall Street, pro-war party.

They are desperately attempting to uphold the authority of a party which has functioned for generations as the principal means through which American capitalism has attempted to smother social movements, from the mass industrial struggles of the early 20th century to the Civil Rights and anti-war movements.

But the Democratic Party has moved so far to the right that it has undermined its ability to continue to play this role. The Democrats

long ago abandoned even the pretense of a social program for the working class. Today, it is the preeminent party of the military and the state apparatus, which opposes the Republicans mainly from their perceived weakness against Russia.

Fain and Sanders understand this very well, and precisely because of it, they could not give an honest answer to their own question. Fain blamed workers for buying into Republican politician rhetoric, declaring there was a “lot of maybe populist rhetoric that comes from Republican Party” and that their candidates “are good at telling people what they know they want to hear.”

In fact, one of the paradoxes of American politics is that, while Trump continues to gain in the polls, the American population is moving to the left, not the right. But this can find no expression in a political system where the working class is systematically disfranchised and voters are forced to choose between two right-wing parties. Sanders himself, in wrapping up his own primary campaigns in 2016 and 2020 and backing first Hillary Clinton and then Biden, has been critical in enforcing this.

Fain attempts to palm responsibility for Trump on the supposed gullibility of workers, but Trump’s main source of strength is the spinelessness of the Democrats. They have refused to seriously prosecute Trump for the January 6 coup attempt, because to do so would cut across their preparations for world war, which requires the support of the extreme right.

### **Promoting nationalism and war**

Sanders and Fain could not even mention war at all. The words “Ukraine,” “Gaza,” “Palestine,” or “genocide” never passed their lips.

To do so would have been to expose not only Biden, but themselves. Sanders, an ardent Zionist, has voted repeatedly throughout his career for military funding both for the US and Israel. Fain, while occasionally citing a dishonest ceasefire resolution designed to get in front of rank-and-file opposition, also backs “Genocide Joe” and threw out pro-Palestinian protesters from the hall when the UAW endorsed Biden in January.

The UAW also deliberately tried to limit the University of California strike and concealed all knowledge of it from autoworkers in Detroit, who learned about it from the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Sanders and Fain’s support for war is inextricably linked with their support for American capitalism, which is going to war to maintain its world supremacy.

For many years, Sanders has promoted nationalist policies with much in common with the outlook of the extreme right. Since his first years in Congress, Sanders has joined hands with right-wing Republicans in attacking trade with China. He has also repeatedly opposed open immigration policies, dividing “native” workers against foreign born.

As for Fain, he is a critical part of the Biden administration’s policy of corporatism, or the joining together of the state with the major corporations and the union bureaucracy in the name of defending the “national interest.” Fain has taken up Biden’s call for a new “Arsenal of Democracy,” a reference to the US war economy during WWII, and is a newly-minted member of the White House Export Council, alongside top CEOs, where he helps direct trade war policy against

China.

### **Crisis in the Democrats and union bureaucracy**

Towards the end of the segment on the elections, Sanders asked, “I’m supporting the president, Shawn is supporting the president—Shawn, you go around the country, what is your argument as to why people should be voting for Joe Biden and not Donald Trump?”

Fain responded by praising Biden for his role in last year’s strike. “[D]uring our strike,” Fain said, “for the first time in in our history, in our nation’s history, a sitting U.S. President, Joe Biden, joined us on the picket line.”

Sanders concurred. “All right, that’s no small thing, so whatever you want to say about Biden—and I have criticism, I know Shawn does—for the first time in American history, a president of the United States walked on a picket line in the middle of a very, very, contentious strike. He showed the world which side he was on, and that had an impact.”

His involvement did not show his supposed support for workers, but the complete integration of the union apparatus with the White House. The “standup strike” and the contract talks were state operations from start to finish, designed to prepare the way for mass layoffs.

Indeed, Fain himself owes his position as union president to a state intervention into the crisis of the UAW. He was “elected” in a vote overseen by a federal monitor with only 9 percent turnout, with more ballots marked undeliverable than cast. This was done to prevent workers from voting for socialist autoworker Will Lehman, who ran for president on a platform of abolishing, not “reforming” the apparatus.

Sanders’ interview with Fain was an indication of just how totally reliant the Biden administration is on the union bureaucracy, not only for suppressing the class struggle and preparing for war but even for any semblance of popular support.

But if the Democrats believe that Biden’s association with the UAW bureaucracy is a source of political strength, they are badly mistaken. The union bureaucracy is widely hated. By openly associating the White House with these betrayals, Biden is inviting the conclusion among workers that they are fighting not just against sellout artists in the UAW, but the entire political system. At the same time, the bureaucracy’s support for Biden only exposes its support for war and genocide.

A handful of deceitful phrases on the part of Sanders and Fain is not enough to paper over this reality. But the opposition from below must find an organized and conscious expression. The critical issue workers confront is building a socialist, anti-capitalist and anti-war movement completely independent of the two official parties, their supporters and their agents in the union bureaucracy.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**