

Biden proclaims AFL-CIO union bureaucrats as “my domestic NATO” before attending second day of summit

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On Wednesday morning, President Biden visited the headquarters of the AFL-CIO trade union federation in Washington D.C. for 45 minutes, before departing for the NATO summit. His meeting with the Executive Council, including the heads of unions with over 12 million members, was preceded by brief public remarks.

The corporate media reported on the event primarily from the standpoint of Biden’s efforts to shore up his flagging election campaign by appealing to his base in “organized labor,” in reality, the trade union bureaucracy. But the fact that the visit took place only minutes before the second day of the NATO summit underscores the role of the unions as critical in preparing the “home front” for war.

In his opening remarks, Biden said perhaps more than he intended in drawing the connection between imperialist war abroad and the use of the AFL-CIO to suppress the class struggle at home.

“We have two strong, strong organizations in America that I look to for our security. One is NATO, a joint assembly of democracies to make sure that we’re keeping the peace, and that no one is going to screw around with us, is as strong as it’s ever been. And I look at you as my domestic NATO,” he told the assembled AFL-CIO bureaucrats.

While NATO is used for American imperialism’s wars in the Middle East and against Russia and China, the president did not say who the enemy he needed the labor bureaucracy to wage domestic warfare against. But it is the American working class.

Biden gave a public speech apparently intended to show his “vigor” and dispel concerns about his age and mental fitness. But he stammered and tripped over his words while delivering a speech on the US economy that bore no relation to reality. “We’re going to build this country

from the bottom-up and the middle-out, not the top-down,” he claimed, immediately contradicting himself by pointing to the support for his economic platform by Wall Street.

He then claimed that the US was the “fastest-growing economy in the world.” Whether this is what he meant to say or not, it is an absurd falsehood. According to the latest International Monetary Fund figures, annual GDP growth in the US is 2.7 percent. This is below Egypt, Albania and Ukraine. However, under Biden corporate profits have surged past already-record levels.

Far from building the economy from the “bottom up,” the basis of this “success” has been massive attacks on the working class. A central plank of his domestic economic policy is curbing wage growth through higher interest rates, austerity measures and by working with the union bureaucracy to block or limit strikes. The result is that since the start of 2023, US companies have announced more than 1 million layoffs.

The aim of this policy is to both smash resistance in the working class to poverty wages and terrible working conditions and to free up resources for war. In the latest federal budget, military spending reached \$850 billion dollars.

Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party’s vice presidential candidate, responded to Biden’s speech:

It came as no surprise that the AFL-CIO Executive Board lined up behind Biden Wednesday and hailed him as a conquering hero. This underscores the complete integration of the bureaucrats with the Democratic Party, and through it, American imperialism. Boasting about his reliance of the AFL-CIO to wage war abroad

and war against the working class at home, Biden told the union bureaucrats: “You are my domestic NATO.”

Biden’s corporatist policy draws together the union apparatus with corporate America and the military-industrial complex to protect the so-called “national interest.” This means defending American imperialism’s interests on the backs of the working class. In one major national contract after another for the past four years, Biden has worked closely with his agents in the unions to block or limit strikes and impose contracts with historic concessions.

This includes the national rail contract in 2022, when Biden intervened to ban a strike after workers rejected a contract he brokered. It also includes the new contract in the auto industry, which Biden personally campaigned for. In the months since it was passed, thousands of autoworkers have lost their jobs.

The union bureaucrats all support the war in Ukraine, which raises the danger of nuclear war. As for the Gaza genocide, they either openly support it, as is the case for American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, or have attempted to get in front of rank-and-file anger by passing toothless “ceasefire” resolutions, even as they continue to support “Genocide Joe.”

For now, most of the union apparatus continues to back Biden, in spite of his deep unpopularity among workers and as growing numbers of his billionaire backers and political allies call for him to step down. The AFL-CIO tweeted on his visit, “No president has been more invested in expanding the labor movement and empowering workers than President Joe Biden. We were honored to welcome the President back to the House of Labor today and stand in strong solidarity with the Biden-Harris ticket.”

Some sections of the bureaucracy are hedging their bets. The Teamsters, for example, are courting Trump. Next week, Teamsters President Sean O’Brien will speak at the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, which will have the character of a Nuremberg-style rally to coronate Trump.

As the WSWS has pointed out for some time, its undying support for capitalism and hatred of socialism, its extreme nationalism and gangster methods against rank-

and-file resistance has long made the labor bureaucracy fertile ground for fascism.

Whether they back Biden, another Democrat or the fascistic Republicans, the affluent layers who make up the labor bureaucracy are inherently drawn to the capitalist state to defend their privileged positions against an increasingly militant and radicalized working class.

In his statement, White concluded:

Biden’s appearance only underscores that the working class has to rebel against the entire union apparatus and build new organizations of workers’ power, rank-and-file committees. In particular, it underscores the correctness of autoworkers’ demands for new elections in the United Auto Workers. New revelations confirm UAW President Fain, a top Biden ally, was elected on the basis of mass vote suppression and is deeply implicated in corruption.

The fight against the union bureaucracy is a political struggle. Behind the Fains and Weingartens stand the capitalist state and both parties. They depend on the services of the union bureaucracies to prevent working class opposition from escaping the control of official, corporate-controlled channels. But that is exactly what must happen. Inequality, war, the threat of dictatorship and every other social problem requires the mobilization of the working class against the capitalist system that the bureaucracy defends.



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