

Biden's "domestic NATO": The trade union bureaucracy backs escalating global war

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On Wednesday morning, before departing for talks at the NATO summit in Washington, President Biden visited the AFL-CIO headquarters for a pep rally with the union bureaucracy. The embattled 81-year-old is hated by workers and youth for his war policies, especially the genocide in Gaza, and his re-election campaign is in free fall. But the assembled union officials gave him a hero's welcome and hailed him as their leader.

In remarks delivered with characteristic stuttering, filled with absurd claims about the strength of the US economy, Biden made an unusually frank and lucid statement on the role of the bureaucracy in his class war policies. He said:

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.

In reality, NATO is an imperialist alliance originally formed to counter the Soviet Union. Its members have been involved in decades of wars of conquest, including most recently the bombing of Serbia in the late 1990s, the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan in the early 2000s and the dismemberment of Libya in 2011. At this week's summit, NATO is dropping all pretense that it is not at war with Russia in Ukraine, raising the danger of nuclear conflict.

The union bureaucrats are no less the enemies of workers. Steeped for decades in nationalism and anti-communism, they have helped to enforce continuous mass layoffs, wage cuts and other attacks on workers. They are joined at the hip with the capitalist state. They have also long functioned as tools of American foreign policy through their involvement in CIA fronts, such as the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center.

Biden's comparison raises the obvious question: Against whom is this "domestic NATO" at war? Above all, it is the

American working class, which is fed up with poverty and inequality and despises the whole political setup.

The "domestic NATO" in America is mirrored in other NATO countries. The new Labour government in Britain and the Canadian Liberal government of Justin Trudeau both rely heavily on the support of the union apparatus. The German unions are involved in "Concerted Action" with the government and employers. This shows that Biden's policies rest on the social character and function of the union apparatus, not on the subjective qualities of the present bureaucrats in America.

Biden, who styles himself as the most "pro-union president in US history," is using the services of the bureaucracy to block strikes and impose layoffs. The White House has been involved in every major contract in the past four years. This includes the refinery workers' contract in 2022, the railroad workers' contract that same year where he intervened to ban a strike, the West Coast dockworkers and last year at UPS, which is now laying off thousands of workers.

The United Auto Workers, traditionally the most politically important union in America, has especially close ties with the White House. Last year Biden openly backed the union's sellout of its phony "stand-up strike," which has paved the way for thousands of job cuts. UAW President Shawn Fain is a key political ally of Biden.

Fain is not just a principal surrogate for Biden's re-election campaign but a surrogate of his foreign policy. He has been appointed to the trade war Export Council and invited to summits with foreign dignitaries alongside billionaires and warmongers.

Biden's use of the phrase "domestic NATO" underscores that the political establishment sees the war on the working class as a key theater of World War III, no less important than the subjugation and carve-up of rivals such as Russia and China. In his 2022 National Security Strategy, Biden boasted that his administration "has broken down the dividing line between domestic and foreign policy." The whole of American society must be subordinated to war, and

this requires the suppression of resistance in the working class.

Over the past year, Biden has repeatedly invoked the “Arsenal of Democracy”—the propaganda name for American military production during World War II—as the model for today. When accepting the UAW’s endorsement at the start of the year, while bureaucrats ejected anti-genocide protesters, he declared workers had to build “aircraft carriers and tanks” like they did in the 1940s. Fain has since taken up this theme, wearing a sweatshirt with the phrase “Arsenal of Democracy” alongside an image of a B-24 bomber.

The claim that US capitalism was fighting World War II for “democracy” was always false. In reality, it was fighting to become the world superpower, and in furtherance of this aim did not hesitate to use nuclear weapons, intern Japanese-American civilians, and commit other crimes against humanity. The so-called “Arsenal of Democracy” was imposed on workers through a no-strike pledge from the union bureaucrats and through the arrest of anti-war socialists.

But the key difference between now and then is that US imperialism is not a rising power but in terminal decline. It is aligned with open neo-Nazis in Ukraine and is deeply involved in a second edition of the Holocaust, against the Palestinian people in Gaza.

Instead of New Deal jobs programs, the US government is spearheading massive unemployment. American democracy is sliding towards fascism and dictatorship under the weight of intolerable levels of social inequality. Meanwhile, while the opportunist union bureaucrats of the 1940s retained some credibility for their association with strikes during the Great Depression, the bureaucracy today is hated by workers and totally reliant on support from the state and corporate management.

The two pillars of Biden’s corporatist alliance between the government and the union bureaucracy are both rotting on their feet. Whether or not he is the Democratic candidate in the fall, Biden’s senility, as well as the fact that his opponent is the aging fascist Trump, expresses the advanced decay of American political institutions.

The bureaucracy is totally implicated in this crisis. At the same time as questions emerged in ruling circles about Biden’s candidacy, bombshell revelations confirmed that the Fain administration in the UAW is completely illegitimate. A court-appointed monitor is investigating corruption charges against Fain and the UAW’s top leadership. Meanwhile, a federal judge recently ruled in favor of socialist autoworker Will Lehman in his lawsuit against the voter suppression, backed by the Department of Labor and the monitor, in the sham vote which brought Fain to power.

In response, support is growing among autoworkers new elections in the UAW, this time controlled by the rank and file, not the bureaucrats or their government friends.

Workers should not underestimate the ruthlessness of the ruling class. But this crisis shows they are not all-powerful. Workers can and must intervene on the basis of an independent organization and strategy.

This means the development of rank-and-file committees to prepare a rebellion to overthrow the union apparatus and transfer power to the workers themselves. The growing global network of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) testifies to the widening support for such a perspective.

But above all, workers are confronted with a political struggle. The bureaucracy is an instrument of the ruling class, whose social interests are incompatible with the solution of any social problem workers confront. The working class must mobilize its immense social power against the capitalist system itself, which is the source of war and dictatorship, and replace it with a workers’ government.

The IWA-RFC is co-sponsoring the July 24 rally called by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party to oppose the genocide in Gaza. The demonstration will coincide with and denounce Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s address to Congress. The purpose of the rally is to elaborate the socialist strategy for the working class to put a stop to genocide and imperialist war.

The development of a rank-and-file rebellion against Biden’s “domestic NATO” is a necessary component of this fight. We call on all workers to register to attend and to sign up to get involved.



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