

American Postal Workers Union convention last week combined Gaza ceasefire resolution with ill-timed endorsement of “Genocide Joe” Biden

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The biennial national convention of the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) came to a close last Friday in Detroit, Michigan. The assembled delegates also held a rally in downtown Detroit Wednesday afternoon.

The four-day convention was an exercise in doubletalk, with one speaker after another using populist phrases to cover for their own record of betrayals. One of the most grotesque examples of this was the convention’s adoption of a resolution calling for a ceasefire in the Gaza genocide, only for the same body to endorse “Genocide Joe” Biden for re-election.

The ill-timed endorsement came only days before Biden, 81 years old and in failing health, stepped down as the Democratic candidate.

The speakers’ list confirmed the role of the union bureaucracy as an agent of capitalist, especially Democratic Party, politics. Democratic Congressman Bennie Thompson, who is the Chairman of the January 6 Committee, spoke at the convention, along with Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison and Democratic Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib.

These are generally considered “left” figures in the Democratic Party, and predictably none made any criticism either of Biden or of the APWU’s endorsement. This included Tlaib, who led a campaign to vote “uncommitted” in the Michigan primary, claiming this would pressure Biden into abandoning his administration’s support for the Israeli military.

In general, the union bureaucrats and the Democratic Party “lefts” were among the hardest campaigners for Biden to remain the candidate. This expressed their fear that an open contest for the nomination could lead to the raising of political issues, including the Democrats’ pro-war policies, for which they are desperately trying to provide the party with political cover.

Delivering for America

Contracts with three of four postal unions and the United States Postal Service (USPS) either expire this year or have already expired. Postal workers are determined to use this as an opportunity to defeat the “Delivering for America” program, a vast restructuring effort to eliminate tens of thousands of jobs and close hundreds of local post offices.

Workers’ determination, however, collides with the union bureaucracy, which is determined to prevent such a struggle. Because of this, workers

must organize themselves independently in order to fight a two-front battle against both USPS and the union bureaucrats. This is what the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee was founded last September to organize.

Because of a series of high-profile debacles in its rollout, Postmaster General Louis DeJoy has been compelled to temporarily halt the plan. But the basic aim of Delivering for America (DFA), to prepare USPS for privatization, has bipartisan support. It also has the support of the union bureaucracy, which is trying to conceal even basic knowledge of the plan from postal workers.

APWU President Mark Dimondstein directed his State of the Union speech on Delivering for America and the threat of dictatorship. Speaking on DFA, he downplayed issues with the restructuring plan as the product of “management’s incompetence” and did not call for it to be ended, instead limiting his comments to saying “the plan must be slowed down and *some* of the management decisions reversed [emphasis added].”

In other words, Dimondstein’s problem with DFA is not that it is part of an effort to destroy jobs and privatize the post office, but that its implementation has been riven with problems.

APWU backs Biden days before his withdrawal

Turning to the presidential election, he said: “With an election this fall, we should weigh the ramifications of the dangerous march toward dictatorship and what it would mean to the rights of the people, workers, our unions, the public Post Office, and the well-being of society. We must unite...and reject ‘wanna be’ dictators as part of defending our union and worker rights.”

The danger represented by Trump, who heads an emerging fascist movement in America, is very real. It can only be opposed by a movement of the working class connecting the fight against inequality and poverty with a defense of democratic rights, which is incompatible with capitalist exploitation.

By contrast, the spinelessness of the Democratic Party and Biden has created a situation where Trump, less than four years after the failure of his January 6 coup, is stronger than ever. By attempting to subordinate workers to the Democrats, and opposing an independent class struggle against war and dictatorship, Dimondstein and the APWU also bear major responsibility.

Dimondstein concluded his remarks by saying that “The sturdy ship

APWU, built over generations of struggle, will continue to chart the course to safe harbor and a bright future for postal workers and the postal public.” But only two days after the convention, that “ship” ran aground after the candidate they claimed to be the last line of defense against dictatorship was forced to withdraw from the race.

Union bureaucrats join ranks

The convention delegates heard from high-ranking officials from other unions, including Sara Nelson of the Association of Flight Attendants-Communications Workers of America (AFA-CWA), Shawn Fain of the United Auto Workers (UAW), Brian Renfroe of the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) and Liz Shuler, president of the AFL-CIO.

Every one of these figures, responsible for huge sellouts, sought to posture as militants. Nelson, who is also a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, declared: “If you’re done with pension defaults for Main Street and stock buybacks for Wall Street, build your union. If you believe that every person in this country deserves the opportunity for an education, build your union. And APWU, if you just want to tell the boss to kiss your ass, build your union!”

Nelson specializes in this sort of vulgar rhetoric. But her main “accomplishment” as AFA-CWA president was joining with management to secure tens of billions in corporate bailouts in the opening stages of the pandemic. She openly boasted of this at the 2022 *Labor Notes* conference, where she also spoke out against a break by workers with the Democratic Party.

In his remarks, Renfroe declared that in talks with USPS “We refuse to accept anything ... that does not recognize our value and reward us for our contributions to The Postal Service. We fight with you and we will do what we have always done. We will win with you.” But NALC has partnered with USPS to impose the new TIAREAP monitoring system behind the backs of letter carriers, and then secretly extended it .

NALC openly endorses Delivering for America, and Renfroe even lied to a WSWS reporter earlier this year when he claimed that it would not lead to job losses. The APWU made no attempt to reconcile Renfroe’s presence as an honored guest with their nominal opposition to DFA.

UAW President Fain played up the supposed “victory” won in last year’s strike in the auto industry. He claimed that “we let working class people lead the fight. We gave our members the information, we gave them the tools, and we gave them the courage to stand up for themselves. That’s the winning formula. If you follow those core principles you will not lose and I can guarantee you this, the UAW will have your back every step of the way.”

Far from letting workers “lead,” the UAW limited the strike to a handful of plants and then rammed through a contract which is now being used to eliminate thousands of jobs. Since then, Fain’s administration has been exposed as illegitimate through a lawsuit filed by socialist autoworker Will Lehman over vote suppression in the election which brought Fain to power. He is under investigation by a federal monitor on corruption charges, and the UAW bureaucracy has broken out into factional infighting, with each attempting to blame the other for mass layoffs.

Fain, a top ally of Biden, also denounced Trump’s campaign as a “vision of America in which the wealthy rule everyone and everything, and the working class is forced to settle for scraps,” as though this was not already the case and that this vision was not shared by both parties.

The proceedings at the convention make clear that the APWU is preparing similar betrayals in its next contract.

But the convention and its aftermath also make clear that the crisis which has erupted in the Democratic Party has totally implicated the union apparatus. Biden, the self-described “most pro-union president in American history,” has cultivated close ties with the union bureaucracy—in particular those figures who spoke at the APWU convention—in order to suppress the class struggle.

A central purpose of this is to prepare American society for full-scale war. Biden himself made this explicit two weeks ago, when he called the unions his “domestic NATO” during a visit to AFL-CIO headquarters.

The bureaucrats’ only real concern about a Trump presidency is that this corporatist alliance should continue no matter who is the next president. A section of the bureaucracy, represented by Teamsters president Sean O’Brien, are making overtures to Trump to that effect. When O’Brien gave an ultra-nationalist, “America First” speech at last week’s Republican National Convention, he was criticized by other union bureaucrats primarily for not having given it at the Democratic National Convention instead.

The alternative to the bureaucratic alliance with either capitalist party of war and layoffs is the development of workers’ power. This is what the US Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee is fighting to build. The committee is fighting to build new structures, controlled by workers themselves, to take control of the fight and clear the way for a broad struggle, uniting USPS workers across the world in a common fight against layoffs.

In opposition to the nationalism of the bureaucracy, the PWRFC insists on the unity of the interests of workers across the world. Through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, it has contact with postal workers from Canada, Britain, Germany, Australia and other countries, as well as other delivery companies such as UPS.

In a statement last year, the committee explained:

It is to their real allies, the global working class, the majority of human society which creates the world’s wealth, that postal workers must turn to, not to the Democrats and Republicans or to trade union functionaries who are on the other side. There are powerful forces lined up against the postal workers, but the working class, if it is organized around an independent strategy, is more powerful.



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What way forward?