

Gov. Walz defends military record, union bureaucracies at AFSCME convention in Los Angeles

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Minnesota Governor Tim Walz made his first solo campaign appearance Tuesday as the choice of Vice President Kamala Harris to join the Democratic presidential ticket. At the AFSCME (American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees) convention in Los Angeles, he spoke to roughly 4,000 union officials from around the country.

AFSCME is the largest public service workers unions in the United States, with some 1.4 million members. AFSCME rank-and-file members include nurses, school bus drivers, paraprofessionals sanitation workers, civil engineers, public works and administration. Other members are probation and parole and corrections officers.

In his speech Tuesday, Walz attempted to present himself, the Biden-Harris administration, the Democratic Party as a whole, and the trade union apparatus as champions of the working class fighting against “greedy” corporations, whom he called on to begin paying “their fair share.”

Walz opened his remarks by thanking the assembled bureaucrats, “for the privilege of being able to stand with you because I know that AFSCME stands with the American workers,” Walz said, adding, “AFSCME stands for all that is right.”

Pointing to the crucial role the union bureaucracy plays in ginning up votes for Democrats, Walz thanked AFSCME President Lee Saunders for his endorsement. “This guy is a friend to every American worker,” he gushed. “The leadership team of AFSCME is there when we need them, always when we need them, making sure we not just win elections to bank political capital to win another election.”

Turning to Harris, Walz claimed that she “stood on the side of the American workers, and she stood up to the billionaires and fought corporate greed.” Walz did not give an example of Harris “fighting corporate greed,” but noted that “Vice President Harris and I have both had the privilege of joining workers on the picket line.”

After pledging to support the PRO-Act, and the Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act, two bills aimed at strengthening the trade union apparatus, Walz went on an extended defense of his military record. Since being chosen by Harris as her running mate, Walz has seen his Republican opponents attack his 24-year record in the Army National Guard with the claim that Walz retired from the Guard to avoid orders to deploy to Iraq in 2005 before he ran for Congress.

“These guys are even attacking me, for my record of service. And I just want to say, I’m proud to have served my country and I always will be,” he said.

The governor solemnly recounted, “With my dad’s encouragement, a guy who served in the Army during the Korean war, I signed up for the Army National Guard two days after my 17th birthday. I served for the next 24 years for the same reasons all my brothers and sisters in uniform do, we love this country.”

While refusing to comment on US military involvement in any current conflicts, from the war against Russia, to the ongoing genocide in Gaza, Walz declared, “I am damn proud of my service to this country. And I firmly believe you should never denigrate another person’s service record.”

Walz added: “To anyone brave enough to put on the uniform for our great country, including my opponent, I just have a few simple words: Thank you for service and sacrifice.”

Commenting on Walz's campaign stop, Joseph Kishore, Socialist Equality Party candidate for US president observed:

Harris VP Walz's appearance at the AFSCME convention in Los Angeles on Monday had nothing to do with advancing the interests of workers in government, or any other industry.

The fact is the Democratic Party and the trade union apparatus work together to suppress the class struggle in service of the financial oligarchy. This was vividly expressed two years ago in the railroad struggle; after workers rejected White House dictated contracts, Democrats, including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, joined with Republicans and the rail union bureaucracies to delay and eventually block the strike.

Since Walz was speaking before AFSCME officials, it is worth recalling the Supreme Court in the case of *Janus v. AFSCME* six years ago. Arguing in favor of "agency fees" David Frederick, representing AFSCME Council 31 in Illinois, declared, "The fees are the tradeoff. Union security is the tradeoff for no strikes." If the court makes the decision to overturn prior precedent allowing states to mandate agency fees, he warned, "you can raise an untold specter of labor unrest throughout the country."

In other words, extracting union dues and fees from workers for maintaining the apparatus is the exchange for blocking strikes. Seeking to block strikes and the "untold specter of labor unrest" UAW president Shawn Fain has seamlessly transitioned from Biden surrogate to top Harris campaigner. While Fain has pledged to go "to war" for "genocide Joe" Biden, he and the union bureaucracy have done nothing as thousands of auto workers lose their jobs.

The Socialist Equality Party campaign is fighting to mobilize the working class against layoffs, inequality and war. This requires a rebellion against the trade union apparatus and the building of rank-and-file committees. And it

requires a political offensive of the working class against the Democratic and Republican parties, and the capitalist profit-system.

In visiting the AFSCME convention, Walz was following in the footsteps of President Biden, who recently hailed the AFL-CIO as his "domestic NATO," that is, the organization that will protect the interests of big business at home, just as the NATO alliance protects corporate interests worldwide.

And like all capitalist politicians, Walz is clear-eyed about what class interests he is seeking to serve. From the convention, he went directly to a fundraiser in Newport Beach, California, a wealthy Orange County suburb of Los Angeles, as part of what the Associated Press called a "five-state dash for campaign cash."

After Newport Beach, Walz flew on to fundraising appearances in Denver and Boston on Wednesday, followed by stops in Newport, Rhode Island, before making his way to Southampton, New York. At each stop, Walz is speaking to small groups of the super-rich seeking handouts for the Democratic campaign. And he will make promises to the corporate elite that will not be the hot air spewed at union conventions, but actual commitments that the power of the federal government will be at the disposal of the financial oligarchy.



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