

# UAW Chief Betrays His Members Over Gaza Policy

When unions take political positions extrinsic to their mission, they're betraying those members who don't approve of those positions.

By Roger L. Simon

The imperious, overbearing union boss has been a near cliché ever since the debut (1954) of “On the Waterfront” starring Marlon Brando and Lee J. Cobb as boss Johnny Friendly. Considered among the greatest of all American films, it was directed by Elia Kazan and written by Budd Schulberg.

I was reminded of why the iron-fisted union leader over-riding the wishes of his members, as the ironically named Friendly does in the movie, has become so common in our culture by an editorial in the Wall Street Journal (May 3): “[The UAW Has a Gaza Policy.](#)”



United Auto Workers (UAW) President Shawn Fain speaks to United Auto Workers members prior to U.S. President Joe Biden's speech at the UAW's Community Action Program (CAP) legislative conference in Washington on Jan. 24, 2024. (Leah Millis/Reuters)

“The United Auto Workers’ newest members are already getting more than they bargained for, but not in the way they were promised. The union’s leader is all in for campus lawbreaking and he’s denouncing Israel for its war against Hamas.

“UAW President Shawn Fain chose to dive into the debate over anti-Israel campus protests this week and how police should respond. Writing on X (formerly Twitter), he said his union opposes ‘the mass arrest or intimidation of those exercising their right to protest, strike, or speak out against injustice.’ That would be a fine statement in a vacuum. In the context of the protests, it’s a defense of mass trespassing and harassment of Jewish students at Columbia, UCLA and elsewhere.”

What we are seeing here is another betrayal of mainstream Americans by the left. I would be willing to bet my house that Mr. Fain is out of sync with a majority of his members. As the WSJ put it:

“Those views may come as a surprise to Volkswagen workers in Tennessee, who chose to unionize last month, or Mercedes workers in Alabama, who will decide whether to join the UAW by May 17. The union is eager to organize workers at fast-growing southern plants, and it’s promising higher wages. But its pitch is conspicuously light on solidarity with Hamas and Ivy League delinquents, though worker dues will support Mr. Fain’s ideological causes.”

Big surprise on the dues. Meanwhile, even the liberal Bill Maher clearly does not see eye-to-eye with Mr. Fain. From the [Daily Mail](#) (May 4):

“Late night host Bill Maher slammed the student loan forgiveness scheme as guests agreed the political ploy hasn’t turned around his struggling poll numbers.

“The comedian, 68, said the forgiveness plans are particularly offensive to him amid rampant anti-Israel protests occupying college campuses across the nation, as he sees them as ‘supporting Jew hating.’

“‘So, colleges constantly raise tuition, then the kids take out more loans, then the government comes by and pays those loans,’ he said.

“‘So, my tax dollars are supporting this Jew hating? I don’t think so.’”

Mr. Maher seems to have it right this time, as does [this parody of an Allan Sherman](#) semi-classic.

So what gives? Why is Mr. Fain, in a manner typical of the left these days, going against the wishes of his own working-class members?

According to the WSJ, it’s those so-called “elites” again.

“Mr. Fain’s anti-Israel policy may be aimed at appeasing a separate, growing constituency within the UAW: graduate students. By last year more than a quarter of the union’s 400,000 members were university employees, mostly assistants

and adjuncts. Columbia's chapter demanded that the university divest from Israel, and its members showed up to the protest. UAW members were among those arrested when police swept campuses Tuesday night."

Another way to term these "elite" graduate students is "conformists" because that is indeed what they are. Despite or because of their educations, they think alike like automatons.

As it becomes more clear that the organizers, the Students for Justice in Palestine and others, are Marxists, hammers and sickles appearing scrawled at numerous demonstration sites with communist literature on offer, it would seem these "elite conformists" might be well-advised to go, in the words of the immortal Rodney Dangerfield, "[Back to school.](#)"

Mr. Fain might consider joining them. The labor movement used to be predominantly anti-communist (i.e., the AFL-CIO's George Meany). These days, something else is at work. Perhaps, in the case of UAW leadership, a form of globalism, since the mandated electric car has led to nothing but a financial disaster for American auto companies and, therefore, a dismal future for their workers.

I have been a union official myself—a member of the Writers Guild of America West board of directors in the 1990s—and have seen this weird dichotomy firsthand. When unions strive for better pay and fringes (health, pension, and so forth) for their members, they are doing something positive. When they take political positions extrinsic to their mission—as the Writers Guild does repeatedly now, alas—they are betraying those members who do not approve of those positions by what is in essence taxing them, through dues, for what they don't want.

Needless to say, it's not just union members who have to deal with unfair taxation or dues. It's all of us and is as old as the Boston Tea Party or older. By now, most of us are onto this, as indicated by Mr. Maher's panel.

Time much better spent, for those who haven't seen it and even for those of us who have, would be viewing the aforementioned "On the Waterfront." Younger people especially may not know it. Indeed, they may not know that Hollywood once made movies with real power, that were patriotic in the deepest sense, a few anyway.

For those who don't remember, these words may refresh your memory: "[I coulda been a contender ... I coulda been somebody.](#)"  
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