

Boycott Appeals from Palestinian Labor

<http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article10915.shtml>

Palestinian trade unions unanimously support boycott movement

Press release, BDS National Committee, 25 November 2009

In reaction to reports alleging that a Palestinian trade union official has stated his reservations about the Palestinian civil society campaign of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), the full spectrum of the Palestinian trade union movement has expressed solid support for the BDS National Committee (BNC) and for the global BDS campaign against Israel as an effective form of resisting its military occupation, war crimes and apartheid policies.

On 12 November, The Jewish Chronicle, a staunchly Zionist paper published in the United Kingdom, reported that the Secretary General of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU), Shaher Sa'ad, had told a small delegation of British trade unionists that PGFTU "had so little interest in the subject [of boycotting Israel] it had never discussed boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS)." The head of the delegation, Steve Scott, who is the director of Trade Union Friends of Israel (TUPI), a well-oiled lobbying front for Israel in the trade union movement, is quoted in the same article as saying, "the only area where the PGFTU did have a boycott policy was with regard to produce from West Bank settlements. Even then, there was concern about whether that boycott could do more harm than good for the 30,000 Palestinians employed there."

On 14 November, Shaher Sa'ad categorically denied the above report in an interview with Al-Jazeera TV, reiterating his support for the boycott against Israel. The following day, in an official speech before thousands of Palestinian workers at a political rally in Nablus, he called again for "boycotting [all] Israeli goods" and "supporting local [Palestinian] products" as an effective "form of resistance against the Israeli occupation."

Whether Mr. Sa'ad made the statement attributed to him by the Zionist media outlets in the UK or not, the fact remains that PGFTU has officially endorsed the Palestinian civil society campaign of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel, since it was launched on 9 July 2005, and has been a member in the BDS National Committee (BNC), the coalition of Palestinian unions, political parties, NGOs and networks that leads the global BDS campaign, ever since its inception.

If The Jewish Chronicle's report is accurate, something that cannot be taken for granted, given the paper's notorious record, Mr. Sa'ad will have isolated himself completely from the absolute majority of the Palestinian trade union movement, including a solid majority within PGFTU itself. Since the above report, the BNC has officially asked PGFTU for clarifications and for a public, written position confirming its support for the boycott and calling on international trade unions to support BDS. Within hours of our letter, PGFTU-Gaza (which forms a sizable part of the whole Federation) issued an official statement confirming its support for BDS

and condemning any alleged violation of it by Sa'ad. Six trade union factions within PGFTU immediately followed suit, endorsing the BNC position and confirming their unambiguous support for BDS. Union leaders affiliated to all political parties represented in the PGFTU have insisted on the need to combat any attempts to undermine the BDS movement.

Furthermore, the largest, most representative Palestinian trade union federation, the General Union of Palestinian Workers (one of the constituent mass organizations of the Palestine Liberation Organization), reiterated its steady support of BDS and denounced Sa'ad's reported statements as falling completely outside the Palestinian trade union consensus behind the boycott of Israel. The Palestinian Federation of Independent Trade Unions also issued a similar position. It is worth noting that all three federations are part of the BNC.

The Israel lobby groups in the UK and elsewhere have felt quite desperate lately in their abortive attempts to stop the spectacular growth of the BDS movement, particularly among major international trade unions. In South Africa, Great Britain, Ireland, Brazil, Canada and France trade union federations representing tens of millions of workers have endorsed -- partially or fully -- the BDS campaign against Israel. Many trade unions in Europe, Latin America and Canada have also announced their support for the Israel boycott, underlining the dramatic shift in international public opinion against Israel, especially in the aftermath of its war crimes against the Palestinian people in the occupied Gaza Strip, which were squarely condemned by the UN Fact Finding Mission led by South African Judge, Richard Goldstone.

The BNC, including all three federations representing the Palestinian trade union movement, warmly salute all international trade unions who have endorsed BDS, confirming that this is the most effective and needed form of solidarity with the Palestinian people and the strongest challenge to Israel's criminal impunity and exceptionalism. As in the struggle against South African apartheid, Israel's occupation, colonialism and apartheid will only come to an end when international civil society shoulders the moral responsibility by holding Israel to account before international law and universal principles of human rights, and by treating it as a pariah state, as apartheid South Africa was, deserving comprehensive and sustained BDS campaigns.

Any isolated and dissonant statements attributed to any Palestinian trade union official can never be regarded as remotely representing the Palestinian trade union movement, as it would be in direct conflict with the consensus in this movement behind BDS. We urge all international trade unions to heed the call of Palestinian civil society, including the trade union movement, by endorsing BDS. We further urge all trade unions and trade union federations to sever their links with the Histadrut, a Zionist organization that has always played a key role in perpetuating Israel's occupation, colonization and system of racial discrimination, and that has

justified and applauded Israel's war crimes in Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009.

The Histadrut and Israel apologists within the international trade union movement have continuously tried to use partial comments and innuendo by this or that Palestinian trade union official to create a deceptive impression of an imagined "split" in the Palestinian trade union movement on BDS. Today, we reconfirm to the TU movement worldwide that the Palestinian trade union movement stands united in support of BDS and calls on every TU to endorse BDS. This is our best hope to end Israel's grave violations of international law and to attain our inalienable, UN-sanctioned rights, especially our right to self determination.

<http://bdsmovement.net/?q=node/596>

A Statement* by the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) and the Palestinian Trade Union Blocs and Frameworks

25 November 2009

Based on the national and trade union position, which PGFTU has always been a part of, representing the unified national and trade union framework for all Palestinian trade union and labor blocs and frameworks, PGFTU with all its organizations, branches and member trade unions stresses its advanced historic and national role in the Palestinian national movement [in the struggle] to accomplish the national tasks, at the forefront of which is putting an end to the Israeli occupation and colonization and establishing an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital and with the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes from which they were expelled.

In addition, our Federation unambiguously states its principled and committed position for the boycott of Israel in all international forums, and appreciates all international forces, institutions and trade unions that stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people and adopt this position. PGFTU and its member trade unions reiterates that it has been and will always be a key and authentic part of the Palestinian national coalition for the boycott [the BDS National Committee, BNC] and confirms the necessity of supporting the national Palestinian production and of building an [independent] economy free from economic dependency.

[...]

Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU)

Secretary General Shaher Sa'ad and the members of the Executive Committee

Endorsed by: Youth Workers Movement, Central Office for the Workers Movement, Progressive Workers Block, Progressive Labor Union Front, Workers Unity Block, Workers Struggle Block, Labor Solidarity Organization

*Arabic original:

<http://web.alquds.com/docs/pdf-docs/2009/11/26/page1.pdf>

Report on PGFTU's Website (Arabic):

<http://pgftu.org/site2/news.php?action=view&id=965>



Open Letter from U.S. Trade Unionists to AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka

Boycott Apartheid Israel

December 4, 2009

"Sanctions alone cannot eradicate apartheid; that task is ultimately left to the people of South Africa themselves. But economic pressure and political isolation of the South African government can hasten the day when justice and freedom reign in that troubled land." --Richard L. Trumka, June 23, 1987

* * *

"We call on other workers and unions to . . . do all that is necessary to ensure that they boycott all goods to and from Israel until Palestine is free." --Congress of South African Trade Unions, February 3, 2009

* * *

"We urge all international trade unions to heed the call of Palestinian civil society, including the trade union movement, by endorsing BDS. We further urge all trade unions and trade union federations to sever their links with the Histadrut, a Zionist organization that has always played a key role in perpetuating Israel's occupation, colonization and system of racial discrimination, and that has justified and applauded Israel's war crimes in Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009. --Palestinian Trade Union Movement Unanimously Confirms Support for BDS, November 25, 2009

* * *

Dear Brother Trumka:

As labor and anti-apartheid activists, we strongly disagree with your October 27 speech denouncing the movement for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel.

The BDS campaign was initiated in 2005 by Palestinian civil society -- including its entire labor movement. Inspired by the international boycott that helped topple apartheid South Africa, it demands Palestinian self-determination, including an end to Israeli military occupation, the right of refugees to return to the land from which they have been ethnically cleansed since the Nakba of 1947-1948, and equal rights for all throughout historic Palestine.

Support for BDS has grown rapidly, especially since December 27, 2008, when Israel broke a truce with the democratically-elected Palestinian government and attacked Gaza. In the resulting massacre, Israel killed more than 1400 Palestinians, hundreds of them children; maimed and wounded thousands more; and utterly devastated Gaza's infrastructure, including the Gaza headquarters of the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions.

In the best tradition of labor solidarity, South African and Australian dockworkers responded by refusing to handle Israeli cargo, and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) "call[ed] on other workers and unions to follow suit and to do all that is necessary to ensure that they boycott all goods to and from Israel until Palestine is free."

Their action echoes the West Coast dockworkers who refused to handle cargo for Nazi Germany (1934) or fascist Italy (1935); those in Denmark and Sweden (1963), the San Francisco Bay Area (1984) and Liverpool (1988), who refused shipping for apartheid South Africa;

those in Oakland who refused to load bombs for the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile (1978); and those at all twenty-nine West Coast ports who held a May Day strike against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (2008).

Since Gaza, the 2005 BDS call also been endorsed or reaffirmed by numerous other labor bodies around the world, including the trades union congresses of Ireland, **Scotland and the UK; UNISON (UK); Transport and General Workers' Union (UK); I. Union syndicale Solidaires Industrie (France); Canadian Union of Postal Workers; Canadian Union of Public Employees-Ontario; six Norwegian trade unions; and Intersindical Alternativa de Catalunya.**

It is no accident that **South African workers play a leading role in the BDS movement.** They remember that Israel was apartheid South Africa's closest ally. They agree with Archbishop Desmond Tutu's observation that Israel's treatment of Palestinians is "worse than apartheid." They recognize that the Gaza massacre mirrors the infamous Sharpeville massacre of 1960, which gave birth to an international boycott against South African apartheid.

This rising tide of labor support for BDS has only been further vindicated by Israel's rejection of the war crimes indictments issued against it by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the UN's Goldstone Report and numerous other bodies -- many of them Israeli.

The BDS campaign is particularly relevant to workers in the United States.

In the past ten years alone, U.S. military aid to Israel was \$17 billion; over the next decade, it will be another \$30 billion. As in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, U.S. aircraft, white phosphorous and bullets kill and maim on behalf of the occupiers, while both Democratic and Republican politicians condone the slaughter. Amidst deepening economic crisis, workers in this country pay a staggering human and financial price for U.S.-Israeli war and occupation throughout the region.

Despite all of this, however, many U.S. labor officials -- often without the knowledge or consent of union members -- have ignored Palestinian appeals for justice. Instead, they continue to collaborate with the Histadrut, the Zionist labor federation that not only supported Israel's war on Gaza, but which has spearheaded -- and whitewashed -- racism, apartheid, dispossession and ethnic cleansing against the Palestinians since the 1920s.

They have invested billions of our union pension funds and retirement plans in State of Israel Bonds. They have actively encouraged the U.S. to provide the money and weapons that oppress Palestinian workers, and to ensure Israel's role as watchdog for U.S. domination over the oil-rich Middle East.

The Jewish Labor Committee has exploited its carefully groomed "progressive" image by hurling hurls false accusations of "anti-Semitism" against those who challenge racism in the U.S.

labor movement, who support affirmative action for workers of color, who criticize notorious "AFL-CIO" support U.S. war and empire, and -- above all -- who oppose apartheid Israel.

Thus, it was the JLC that in July 2007 mobilized top AFL-CIO and Change to Win officials to condemn British union support for BDS. It is the JLC that seeks to deflect outrage over the Gaza massacres by launching Trade Unions Linking Israel and Palestine, whose stated purpose is to sabotage the BDS campaign, while demanding boycotts against Iran, which -- unlike Israel -- receives no U.S. aid and has no "weapons of mass destruction."

In the 1980s, as president of the United Mine Workers, you rightly argued that, "economic pressure and political isolation of the South African government can hasten the day when justice and freedom reign in that troubled land." Two decades later, the cause of "justice and freedom" for Palestinians requires no less of you as president of the AFL-CIO. As trade unionists, we must immediately and completely:

1. Divest from State of Israel Bonds.
2. Support workers' refusal to handle Israeli cargo.
3. Break ties with the racist Histadrut.
4. Oppose U.S. military and economic aid for Israel.

Initial Signers

(List in formation -- *For identification only)

Monadel Herzallah, President, Arab American Union Members Council, California

Larry Adams, Co-Convener, New York City Labor Against the War; Former President, NPMHU Local 300*

Michael Letwin, Co-Convener, New York City Labor Against the War; Former President, UAW Local 2325/Assn. of Legal Aid Attorneys*; Al-Awda NY: The Palestine Right to Return Coalition; International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network

Brenda Stokely, Co-Convener, New York City Labor Against the War; Former President, AFSCME DC 1707*; Co-Chair, Million Worker March Movement

Sam Weinstein, Former President, UAW Local 132*; International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network

Stanley Heller, AFT Local 1547*, Delegate, CT Central Labor Council*

Marty Goodman, Former Executive Board Member, TWU Local 100*

Steve Zeltzer, Producer, Labor Video Project

Anthony Arno, National Writers Union/UAW Local 1981*

Mike Gimbel, Chair, Labor-Community Unity Committee, AFSCME DC 37 Local 375*; Delegate, NYC Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO*

Dave Welsh, Delegate, San Francisco Labor Council*

To endorse this statement, please contact:

laborforpalestine.us@gmail.com

http://laborforpalestine.wordpress.com/

Please Add my Name to - Open letter to Prisoners for

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

(*)
for ID only

Organization/UNION

1) Monadel Herzallah.

Arab American Union Members Com
LA Palestine Labor Solidarity Comm
Cafe Intifada (UTLA*)

2) Andy Griggs

as above.

3) Emma Rosenthal
+ Pete Nowicki

APSCO Local 145

5 Clayton Brown

~~APRI~~ APRI

6 ~~Frank May~~

~~APL~~ APLC-VA

7 Jim Crumpton

1199 SETC UHWE

8 Allan Fisher

AFT 2121 - city college SF

9 Alan Benjamin

-member, Open local 3

10 Sharon Blake

AFT Local 2 Buildout People Mov

11 Louis LaPortance

AFT Local 1936 PVFT

12 Bill Berman

Oakland Educ Assoc

13 Frank Rosen

UE GVP (retired)

14 Joan Sekler

Doumakey filmmaker

15 Lee Sustar

Chicago Labor Against War

16 Sarah Ringler

PVFT 1936

17 Steve Desautel

TCY/IAM 6608

18 James Redder

IVAW

19 Frank Pinto

UPTE-CWA 9119

20 Rubina Jamil

WORKING WOMEN organization

21 Tony Leon

ALL Palestine Trade Union Federation
Union of workers of the Ministry of Energy & Petroleum/UNEP/IAU