

UAW International Executive Board Upholds Integrity of UAW 2865's Membership Vote to Divest from Corporations Complicit in Oppression of Palestinians, Decides to Nullify Vote Anyway

This statement is issued by the BDS Caucus, a group of rank-and-file UAW 2865 members spanning every UC campus dedicated to organizing and advocating for equality and justice for the Palestinian people. As members of the BDS caucus, we know that nothing can erase the voices and will of the UAW 2865 membership, who spoke loudly and clearly in their vote last year to support Palestinian labor unions' call for solidarity.

After the UC student-workers' labor union holds landslide membership vote to endorse BDS, the UAW International Executive Board (IEB) issued a response to an appeal:

- UAW IEB upholds democratic, participatory nature of vote and member engagement in process
- UAW IEB sides with business and military interests and anti-union lawyers to nullify vote because they say it's bad for business
- Human rights concerns are ignored and social justice not prioritized
- UAW IEB repeats baseless allegations of anti-semitism, ignores testimony of Jewish students

In December of 2014, UAW 2865, the labor union of over 14,000 teaching assistants and other student workers at the University of California, became the [first major U.S. labor union](#) to demand by a majority member vote that their union and employer divest from companies that are complicit in human rights violations against Palestinians. **With a higher-than-usual turnout, UAW 2865 members voted to endorse divestment in a landslide, by 65%.** This resolution was brought to union leadership by rank-and-file members responding to a call from Palestinian labor unions to join the BDS movement.

Over a year later on December 15, 2015, the International Executive Board of United Auto Workers (IEB), which oversees several hundred locals including UAW 2865, issued an appeal decision which unequivocally proclaimed that the charge of an undemocratic election was baseless and that UAW 2865 conducted a fair election with ample opportunity for debate and engagement over several months. In response to the appellant's claim that the BDS resolution was "approved in an undemocratic fashion," the International declared, "To the contrary, the case record discloses that the local union made an earnest effort to engage the membership in the BDS discussions... In any event, after examining the testimonies and reviewing the information received from the Appellant and the local union, we can find no evidence that the local union engaged in any improper actions that may have prohibited a fair and democratic vote on the BDS Resolution. Accordingly, the Appellant's charge of an undemocratic election miscarries for lack of evidence."

This decision cites the over four months of town hall meetings, debates, and educational forums where members consistently engaged the issue in order to make an informed decision on the vote. UAW 2865's official website also linked directly to the website of the anti-BDS opposition caucus "Informed Grads." UAW 2865 elected leaders also solicited numerous written opinions from members both for and against the resolution, and made all of them directly accessible on the union website. Further, next to the ballot box there were two official pro and con statements, authored by the "pro" BDS caucus and the "anti" Informed Grads caucus, respectively.

In addition, the appellant claimed UAW 2865 leadership acted in a way that encouraged voter apathy. In response, the IEB writes, "Contrarily, the local union introduced information to the I.E.B. hearing officer that showed the previous General Election had produced a lesser turnout than the vote on the BDS Resolution."

Thus, in its decision, the IEB unequivocally confirmed the democratic and open nature of our vote process, something which as UAW 2865 activists, we worked hard to ensure. We feel that UAW 2865 members' views were accurately expressed in the BDS vote, and the IEB's decision confirms this.

Surprisingly, the IEB decided to use its authority to “nullify” what in its own judgement was a free and fair election. And while the IEB did not impose any binding restrictions on the Local's organizing efforts, it is nevertheless striking that, rather than nullifying the vote on electoral, procedural, or substantive UAW constitutional grounds, the International rehashed political arguments against BDS and Palestinian self-determination. After naming companies that sell military equipment and weapons including Boeing, Caterpillar, General Electric, Lockheed Martin, ITT, Northrup-Grumman, and Raytheon, the International claimed that BDS would “lead to a direct economic deprivation for members of the UAW, as well as other organized members by, categorically interfering with the flow of commerce to and from earmarked companies.” **The IEB's support for the profits of these companies--their prioritization of the so-called “flow of commerce”--trumps their support for other labor unions, such as the Palestinian labor unions that initiated the call for BDS, and their own members, like the 65% of affirmative voters from UAW 2865.**

Nullifying UAW 2865's vote on this basis contradicts the IEB's necessary role in supporting UAW and other workers who may be harmed not only by exploitative labor relations but also by socially irresponsible foreign investment. **The IEB's main constitutional argument against the BDS election is clearly based on the interests of the employers rather than those of workers.** This is representative of a model of business unionism that many have openly critiqued in the UAW, namely the assumption that the interests of employers are one and the same as the interests of employees. Strangely, the IEB decision even invokes the no-strikes clause of the UAW 2865 contract with the University of California—an article which was imposed to undermine the union's collective bargaining power— to argue that BDS breaches our contract. Claiming that a written request for UC divestment from corporate war profiteers constitutes a serious disruption of the operations of the employer stretches even the wildest imagination.

In making their ruling, the UAW IEB also repeated the same baseless accusations of anti-semitism frequently attributed to anyone who is critical of Israel. Specifically, they claimed that “the local union's attempt to address the predicament of the Palestinian people appears to be accomplished through biased targeting of Israeli/Jewish UAW members, and the scorning of the state of Israel and all alleged entities complicit in actions against Palestine.” This assertion is presented without evidence, and evidence presented to the contrary which can be seen within the official ruling is simply ignored in the conclusions of the IEB. During the four months of debate before the vote, the BDS caucus stated at length its position against national origin discrimination and anti-Semitism. In fact, dozens of Israeli and Jewish current and former members of UAW 2865 signed a letter in support of the BDS resolution. Beyond our membership, more than 700 Jewish individuals signed a [letter of support](#) for the resolution. Many current Jewish and Israeli union members participated actively in campaigning for the resolution. Dozens of Jewish UAW 2865 members, including many signing this letter as part of the Union's BDS Caucus, have spoken repeatedly of how their Jewish values encourage them to combat all forms of racism and oppression, including the dispossession faced by Palestinians.

Presumably due to the weakness of their argument, the IEB also chose to grossly misrepresent the actual text of our resolution. For example, the IEB falsely claimed that a voluntary, non-binding, individual commitment to participate in an academic boycott was somehow a compelling, binding, and

discriminatory action. This mischaracterization was presented without support or explanation and is just one of several glaring mischaracterizations plaguing the IEB's official ruling.

The ballot itself also states:

“In carrying out the activities set forth above and in acting on this proposal, we affirm that this proposal should not be interpreted or applied to seek to influence the hiring or other employment decisions of the University or individual academics or UAW members; nor will it in any way limit or affect the representative functions of the Union including, without limitation, which grievances we pursue, our position on tenure disputes, etc. Additionally, this resolution does not seek to influence or affect what is taught in the classroom or the pedagogy or scholarship of UAW members or of other academics regardless of who they are, while at UC or when involved in UC-sponsored programs or events. Nor does this resolution seek to discourage association with individual Israeli scholars. The UAW is strictly committed to opposing all forms of discrimination including discrimination based on race, religion, national origin or ethnicity, and we affirm our strong commitment to the principles of academic freedom for all in the UC community.

UAW 2865, in its public statements, repeatedly stressed that this resolution targeted multinational corporations, and that it certainly did not target any individuals on any basis, and explicitly not on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, or religion. UAW 2865 leadership, in a resolution adopted in the lead-up to the vote, also explicitly stated that their commitment to anti-oppression organizing extended beyond the question of Palestinian struggle. The statement reads:

“We believe that as student and labor organizers, we have a duty to stand by principles of anti-oppression organizing. **As we stand in solidarity with Palestinian self-determination, we also recognize that here in the United States we have our own systems of structural racism and settler colonialism to resist and dismantle.** In the university system in which we both learn and labor, the disparity in access to people of color and working-class people as well as the existence of our universities on stolen indigenous land alerts us to the importance of making these connections in our movements.”

This broad and consistent commitment to anti-oppression organizing can be seen in a plethora of resolutions endorsed by UAW 2865 leadership in support of the [Ayotzinapa student movement](#), the [Black Lives Matter movement](#), and [gender equity](#), to name only a few. This anti-oppression commitment is certainly not limited to support for Palestinian struggle against oppression, as the IEB seems to imply in its ruling.

The IEB acknowledges these repeated statements from UAW 2865 leadership which demonstrate the non-discriminatory nature of the resolution, statements that clearly align the resolution with the UAW Constitution. Despite this acknowledgement, the IEB proceeds to deem these statements irrelevant to claims of discrimination **without explanation**.

No letter from the IEB can erase the educational and organizational work we have done over the past year, work we will continue to do, energized no doubt by the IEB's undemocratic, business-friendly attempt to nullify this vote. We invite the IEB to join the conversation among union members across the

world moved by the Palestinian people's call for solidarity. Union involvement in this issue is picking up momentum as other Locals have begun similar campaigns, committed to supporting the struggles of Palestinians facing second-class citizenship inside Israel, of those under occupation and military attacks in the West Bank and Gaza, and of the refugees and exiles in diaspora unable to return to their homes. **In the past year, UAW 2865 has been joined by the national union United Electrical and the Connecticut AFL-CIO which also passed BDS resolutions.**

The BDS Caucus of UAW 2865 reaffirms its commitment to fulfill the clear will of UAW 2865 membership and leadership, by standing in solidarity with Palestinian labor unions in their struggle for self-determination, and continuing to promote boycott, divestment, and sanctions against corporations and institutions complicit in human rights violations in Palestine and beyond. UAW 2865 members' overwhelming response to the call for solidarity issued by Palestinians and Palestinian unions will continue to inspire other workers. We are part of a growing movement for union solidarity with the people of Palestine and for a democratic and visionary U.S. labor movement. As workers, educators, and students, we know together we can prevail over these forms of repression and continue striving for justice for all peoples.

Sincerely,

The BDS Caucus