

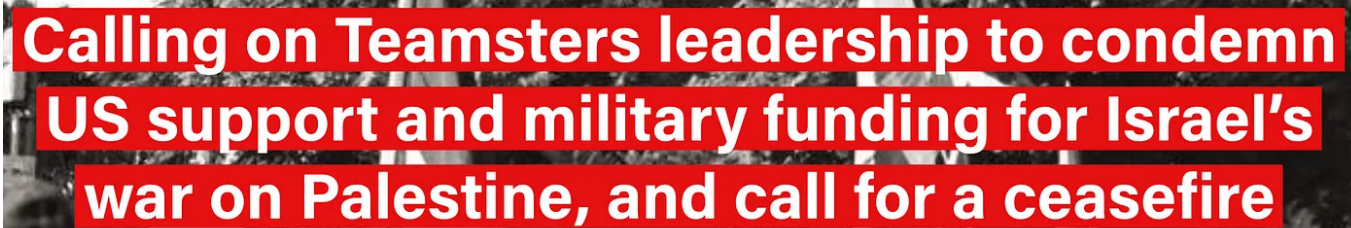


Joe Allen · [Follow](#)

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A Tale of Two Resolutions: Why is TDU So Hostile to Anti-War Activism? by Joe Allen



**Calling on Teamsters leadership to condemn
US support and military funding for Israel's
war on Palestine, and call for a ceasefire**

From the Teamsters Mobilize website

The Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), the longstanding reform organization, held its annual convention in early November in Chicago, several months following the end of the UPS contract campaign. Nearly five hundred Teamsters, mostly rank and filers attended the convention, which TDU claimed was the largest convention in many years. TDU's report on the convention is available here.

While Teamster General President Sean O'Brien spoke on Friday evening and there was an array of workshops held during the weekend of November 3-5, the highpoint of the convention was the Saturday night plenum with UAW President Shawn Fain. Fain had recently led historic strikes in the auto industry. The UAW's strikes were the big industrial fight that many of us were hoping for this year. The much hyped and anticipated UPS strike didn't materialize.



The TDU convention was by-and-large a pretty ho-hum affair, except for the efforts of Teamsters Mobilize (TM), a small network of activists, to discuss several important issues, including a resolution calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. For their worthwhile efforts, one member of TM was banned from the convention, while others were told they couldn't hand out any of their literature. You can watch an extensive interview with TM members about their convention experience here.

For many years, the TDU staff led by Ken Paff, now formerly retired but still playing an active role, and David Levin, have heavily policed attendance at the convention and stifled any critical debate and discussion. This year, David Levin banned Chantelle (also known as Audrey in her articles), a UPS part timer from the convention even after she registered, because she wrote a criticism of TDU in *Cosmonaut*. No criticism of TDU is allowed to be debated at the convention, and great efforts were and are made behind the scenes to ensure that only positive stories of TDU are published in the media.

It is a reflection on the state of the U.S. Left that this side of TDU is not better known outside a handful of people. The Left media — especially *Jacobin*, *In These Times*, and *Labor Notes* — along with many socialist organizations, including the biggest Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), act as an echo chamber amplifying TDU's image as a “grassroots organization of thousands of [Teamster] members across North America.” TDU, of course, has its roots in the radical rank and file movements of the 1970s, but has traveled far from them in the ensuing four decades.

Despite the efforts of Paff and other members of the TDU steering committee, TM members Colleen D. and Jess L. got their Gaza resolution, and others, including one on open bargaining, to the floor for discussion. It

was a good resolution on Gaza, better than most put forward in many unions. It read as follows:

Whereas, Palestinian trade unions have issued an appeal and call to action asking their brothers and sisters in the international trade union movement to take immediate action to end all forms of complicity with Israel's war on Gaza and occupation of Palestine, and this is especially important for unions in the U.S. given the U.S. is the biggest economic, military, and political supporter of Israel;

Whereas, a stated object of TDU is to 'strengthen the Teamsters union from within by building a unified movement of rank and file Teamsters,' and one of the principles of the trade union movement should be international solidarity with other workers;

Be it resolved that TDU will sign onto a statement call on IBT General President Sean O'Brien to 1) oppose the Biden administration's proposal to send billions of dollars in military aid to Israel, and 2) call on the U.S. government to immediately issue a call for a ceasefire and condemn Israel's bombing and ground invasion in Gaza.

The major argument against it was, and I paraphrase here, that "politics don't belong here" and "that's not the role of TDU." The Gaza resolution was then "tabled," which means it could be reconsidered for a future meeting of TDU International Steering Committee (ISC). Hopefully, it will be. But, the opportunity for the TDU convention to have an impact on resolutions being discussed and put forward in Teamster local unions across the country was missed. It was heartening to hear that, according to one friend, about 20% of the convention delegates vote not to table it.

Iraq War

This frustrating experience for TM members reminded me of a similar event two decades ago, when a few of us, mostly members of the International Socialist Organization (ISO), attempted to get an antiwar resolution passed at the TDU convention in the fall of 2002. We were motivated to do this because of President George W. Bush's military buildup and plan to invade and occupy Iraq. The previous year saw the devastating terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon on 9-11. The U.S. soon afterwards invaded and occupied Afghanistan with widespread support from the U.S. public and internationally, but that goodwill wasn't transferred to his war drive against Iraq.

International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 705, "Resolution Against the War" (October 18, 2002)⁵

Whereas, we value the lives of our sons and daughters, of our brothers and sisters more than Bush's control of Middle East oil profits;

Whereas, we have no quarrel with the ordinary working-class men, women, and children of Iraq who will suffer the most in any war;

Whereas, the billions of dollars being spent to stage and execute this invasion, means billions taken away from our schools, hospitals, housing, and social security;

Whereas, Bush's drive for war serves as a cover and a distraction for the sinking economy, corporate corruption, lay-offs, Taft-Hartley (used against the locked out ILWU [International Longshore Workers' Union] longshoremen);

Whereas, Teamsters Local 705 is known far and wide as fighters for justice;

Be It Resolved that Teamsters Local 705 stands firmly against Bush's drive for war;

Further Resolved that the Teamsters Local 705 Executive Board publicize this statement, and seek out other unions, labor and community activists interested in promoting anti-war activity in the labor movement and community.

Bush's popularity shot up following 9-11, but he was always seen as an illegitimate president by many. After all, he won with a minority of the popular vote in the 2000 election, but a majority in the Electoral College aided by the suppression of Black votes in Florida, and the Supreme Court. He later received Congressional authorization for the unlimited use of military force against Iraq along and major attack on civil liberties with the Patriot Act. Bush also launched an attack on trade unions. The Bush administration's "Global War on Terror" driven by the daydream of a new American Century raised the specter of endless conflict.

We also had a sense that Bush was not that popular at our workplace, United Parcel Service (UPS). His support after 9-11 was wide but not very deep. When he visited Chicago's Jeff St. UPS hub in April 2002, to tout some welfare reform scam that UPS was milking, several of us, including my late friend Dave Healy, decided to hand out anti-Bush leaflets to package car drivers coming into work a few hours before he was to arrive. No one criticized us openly and many were very receptive to what we had to say about Bush's war drive being a cover for an attack on workers at home.

But, it took another six months and the bold initiative of fellow Teamster and UPSer Kieran Knudson to really see where antiwar sentiment stood. Kieran was also a member of a small radical group of UPSers called Uprise! In October 2002, Kieran Knudson introduced the now famous resolution against the Iraq War at the membership meeting. It was a great resolution. The resolution was unique in the modern history of the U.S. labor movement. It read as follows:

Resolution Against the War

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Further Resolved that the Teamsters Local 705 Executive Board publicize this statement, and seek out other unions, labor and community activists interested in promoting anti-war activity in the labor movement and community.

The resolution passed overwhelmingly 402 to 1, very much to the surprise of everyone after a vigorous debate. It was a small but real breakthrough in the unions. The *Chicago Sun-Times* reported that Paul Waterhouse, who was the media spokesperson for Teamsters 705, thought the vote was out of the ordinary. He said, "There usually isn't much foreign policy debate in a big truck drivers' union." Many people at the time would have agreed, despite Teamsters 705 having a bit of a lefty reputation under the leadership of the late Gerry Zero at the time.

I wrote about Zero's legacy before, available [here](#). Gerry, whom I personally liked but grew distant from him after he came out for the reelection of James P. Hoffa in 2001. At the time, Teamsters 705 was the second largest Teamster

local union in the country with the bulk of the members working at UPS, followed by a variety of local and national freight companies, and movers. While Gerry played little role in passing the resolution, he embraced it, and eventually he hosted the founding convention of U.S. Labor against the War.

Soon after the October 2002 local meeting, several of us were planning on attending the upcoming TDU convention. We had hopes that a resolution modeled on the 705 resolution could get a hearing and possibly pass the convention, despite TDU's hostility to discussing any issues beyond their "pure and simple" trade unionism. We hoped our resolution would be treated differently in part because Teamster General James P. Hoffa, a toxic symbol of the old guard, was one of the few trade union leaders to sign up for Bush's war drive. He was a member of the neoconservative Committee for the Liberation of Iraq.

First Teamster killed in Iraq



Sgt. Sherwood Baker is the first member of our union to die in Bush's war in Iraq. He was a member of Teamsters' Local 401 and the Pennsylvania Army National Guard. Sherwood worked as a case worker for the Pennsylvania Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation. He was killed in Iraq on April 26 and was 30 years old.

Sherwood Baker left behind a wife and a nine year old son.

“My son was betrayed by the Bush administration...”

Sherwood Baker's adoptive parents Alfred and Celeste Zapala, veteran peace activists, spoke to the independent radio program Democracy Now about the death of their son and against the policies of the Bush administration on May 8. Here are some of their comments:

“It was a senseless death, just like all those other boys...and the 10,000 plus Iraqi citizens that got killed in Iraq.”

“My son was betrayed by the Bush administration. This whole war—you know, people make analogies with Vietnam with Vietnam and Iraq, and I think that the big difference is that it took years to find out the lies in Vietnam. We discovered the lies in less than a year.”

“He was everybody's soldier. He was everybody's son and I cannot, cannot and will not, stop trying to speak the truth and get other people to speak the truth.”

Bring the Troops Home Now!

Written & distributed by concerned members of Teamsters 705 at Jeff. St.

UPS & Bush's War in Iraq

Bush would not have been able to launch his insane war for oil and empire in Iraq without the crucial financial backing of corporate America. Here is a list of campaign contributions from UPS to the Bush re-election campaign:

- Mike Eskew, Chairman & CEO—\$2,000
- Jim Kelly, member of the Board of Directors—\$1000
- UPSPAC—\$10,000 to Bush re-election campaign
- \$751,885 to Republican candidates to US House of Rep.
- \$126,250 to Republican candidates to U.S. Senate

Unfortunately, we ran into the same problems at the TDU convention that Teamsters Mobilize did two decades later. We handed out hundreds of copies of the resolution, and spoke to many convention attendees in the days running up to the reading of the resolution. Several of us spoke to the resolution after it was read. I distinctly remember one veteran TDU member who argued against the resolution. He told the convention, “I like birds and that’s why I give to the Audubon society. This isn’t the place for this.” It didn’t seem to cross his mind that potentially thousands of Teamsters would be mobilized for combat and face death, injury, and disability in the months to come.

In the end, the resolution was tabled and forgotten. The opportunity for TDU, seen as opposing the coming war, what were eventually dubbed the “Forever Wars,” was lost and the Teamsters under Hoffa were seen in the pro-war camp. In the two decades since then, I have never seen any evidence that taking an anti-war stance in 2002 would have hurt it in any way.

Gaza

Teamsters

Anti War

Tdu

