

LABOR INTERVIEW PODCAST ISRAEL & PALESTINE

The New York Supreme Court Just Blocked a Union From Voting on a Pro-Palestine Resolution

In a seemingly unprecedented move, the NY Supreme Court just granted a temporary restraining order preventing members of the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys – UAW Local 2325 from even voting on a resolution calling for a ceasefire in Gaza.

MAXIMILLIAN ALVAREZ

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Demonstrators wave flags in support of Palestinians during a rally to call for a ceasefire in Brooklyn on November 18, 2023.

KENA BETANCUR/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



'This is McCarthyism all over again

Read the full transcript below.

With each passing day, more Israeli bombs are falling on Gaza, more bodies are being blown apart and buried under the rubble, over a million Palestinians have been displaced from their homes. Over the past month and a half, the world has borne witness to a genocidal military campaign to clear out Gaza once and for all, and every day, every hour, it feels like the chance to stop one of humanity's most inhumane crimes is slipping through our fingers, and the powers that be have shown no interest whatsoever in listening to the thundering calls for a ceasefire coming from governments and mass demonstrations around the world, particularly the Biden administration in the US, the increasingly fascist Netanyahu government in Israel, and the arms manufacturers and war profiteers who are raking in billions from manufacturing mass death. This is prompting people of conscience around the world, including unions and worker-led groups, to speak out and take action to try to stop the slaughter.

One of those unions is the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys – UAW Local 2325 (ALAA), whose members include legal aid workers at over 25 organizations, including the Bronx Defenders, Brooklyn Defender Services, Neighborhood Defender Service, and the Legal Aid Society of New York City. Last week, ALAA members were preparing to hold a vote on whether or not to approve the union publicly issuing a “Resolution Calling for a Ceasefire in Gaza, an End to the Israeli Occupation of Palestine, and Support for Workers’ Political Speech.” In the lead-up to the vote, union members at different legal aid offices reported strong opposition from management. “These statements call for the elimination of the state of Israel and the annihilation of the Jewish people,” Twyla Carter, Chief Executive Officer of the Legal Aid Society, reportedly told staff, expressing concern that certain donors would pull funding from the Legal Aid Society if the union passed the resolution. Then, on Thursday, Nov 16, as Akela Lacy reports at *The Intercept*, “attorneys at the Legal Aid Society of Nassau County sued in New York State Supreme Court to stop the vote, saying it posed an ethical dilemma for attorneys that would make it “impossible for them to properly do their job as Public Defenders.” Those four attorneys were ALAA bargaining unit members. “On Friday,” Lacy continues, “the court granted a temporary restraining

order enjoining the vote. Voting had gotten underway at 9 a.m. and only 15 minutes were left on the clock when the injunction was issued. The tally never got underway.”

In this urgent episode of *Working People*, TRNN Editor-in-Chief Maximillian Alvarez speaks about this unprecedented attack on union democracy and workers’ free speech rights with three ALAA members: Allie Goodman, an attorney in the Family Defense Practice at Bronx Defenders; Michael Letwin, a former public defender at Legal Aid in Brooklyn for 37 years who also served as president of ALAA – UAW Local 2325 for 13 years; and Dany Greene, who has worked as a public defender for six years, four of which were spent at Bronx Defenders, where they helped found and organize the BXD Union, and who now works at an appellate office focusing on criminal appeals.

TRANSCRIPT

This transcript has been edited for length and clarity.

Allie Goodman: My name is Allie Goodman. I work at the Bronx Defenders. I’ve been there for three years, and I am an attorney in the Family Defense Practice. I’m also a member of our union. In the Family Defense Practice we defend parents and caretakers against government allegations of abuse and neglect, and also relevant to this podcast, I organize with the Jewish Voice for Peace chapter in New York City.

Michael Letwin: My name is Michael Letwin. I was a public defender at Legal Aid in Brooklyn for 37 years, for 13 years of which I was president of our union, ALAAUIW 2325. And I’m a co-founder of both Labor for Palestine, which is at laborforpalestine.net, and Jews for Palestinian Right of Return.

Dany Greene: My name’s Dany Greene. I’ve been a public defender for six years. For four years I worked at the Bronx Defenders doing trial level criminal public defense. I helped found and organize the BXD Union, and I’m now working at an appellate office doing criminal appeals, and I also organize with Jewish Voices for Peace.

Maximillian Alvarez: All right. Well, welcome everyone to another episode of Working People, a podcast about the lives, jobs, dreams, and struggles of the working class today, brought to you in partnership with *In These Times Magazine* and the *Real News Network*, produced by Jules Taylor, and made possible by the support of listeners like you.

My name is Maximilian Alvarez and we’ve got an urgent mini cast for y’all today. I’m really, really grateful to have Dany, Michael, and Allie on the show, especially after everything that we are all going

through as a society and that they are going through as workers and union members amidst the just devastating assault on Gaza. The humanitarian crisis that is unfolding before our eyes, as you guys well know. You have no doubt listened to the episodes that we've published in recent weeks, including the nine-minute conversation I got to have with Issa Amro in the occupied West Bank after he had just narrowly escaped violent settlers who were chasing him in Hebron.

And you heard the three-minute message from Gaza that we received from journalist Mohamed El Saife. Hopefully you've been following the work that we've been doing at the *Real News Network*, where I've also been interviewing trade unionists in the UK who are forming human blockades around Israeli weapons suppliers. You've heard me on *Breaking Points* interviewing healthcare workers in New York, leading candlelight vigils in solidarity with their healthcare colleagues in Gaza. We're doing everything we can to lift up the voices of regular people who are taking a stand and speaking out against the genocidal violence.

Now, we are recording this episode on Sunday, November 19th. There are initial reports out today from the Washington Post that we may see, by the time this episode comes out, it is possible that there will be a five-day pause in the slaughter. Again, I don't want to report on this before it is locked in, but there are reports that there may be a five-day pause based on a US brokered agreement between Hamas and Netanyahu's government. So we'll see what happens with that. But the fact remains that we've already lost so much. Palestinians have lost so much. Israeli families whose loved ones were killed on October 7th have lost so much. This is to say nothing of the countless people who have lost so much over 75 years of violent occupation.

And as I said at the top, we've been doing our best here at Working People and at the *Real News Network* to try to lift up the voices of regular people taking a stand, speaking out. People of conscience who refuse to sit idly by while this slaughter unfolds. And our guests today are part of that, right? I mean, we are going to discuss how Dany, Michael, Allie, and their fellow union members with the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys represented by UAW Local 2325—this is New York City's union of over 3000 public defenders and legal workers at different offices—you may have been hearing over the past couple days about the saga that they have been embroiled in their efforts to release a resolution as a union calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and support for workers' political speech.

Now, I want to just read extensively from a recent report that came out this weekend by Akela Lacy at *The Intercept*. We will link to this report in the show notes, but I just wanted to sort of read a number of passages from Akela's report just so listeners have a sort of baseline understanding of what we're going to talk about today, because there's a lot of nuances here that I want to make sure we don't pave over. And then I'm going to turn things over to our guests to really give us the story from their side. Let us know what's going on over there.

But to give everyone just a common basis of understanding here, Akela Lacy writes in *The Intercept*, in a piece titled Public Defenders Get Restraining Order to Block Their Own Union from Voting On Gaza Statement, Akela writes, “Five groups providing public defender services in New York City are cracking down on speech about Palestine. Leadership at the groups are pushing back on statements or internal communications that reference the siege on Gaza, and at least one staffer has been forced to resign. Two of the organizations sent cease and desist letters to union shops, considering resolutions calling for a ceasefire. Another group called staffers into meetings with human resources for using work channels to share links about Palestine and proposing to do fundraising for the Palestine Children’s Relief Fund in lieu of an annual holiday party. Management at several of the offices said statements on Gaza, under consideration by their unions, were jeopardizing funding. Pro-Israel activists launched a petition to defund the Bronx Defenders after its union issued a statement opposing Israel’s, “Genocidal intent,” in Gaza.

Public defender offices across the country are already severely underfunded. While most rely heavily on public funding, many also receive support from private institutions including major law firms. Several firms have responded to criticism of Israel’s war in Gaza by rescinding job offers and threatening to curb recruiting efforts at law schools. On Thursday, ahead of the union wide vote on a statement, the Legal Aid Society called a staff meeting. According to a partial recording of the meeting obtained by *The Intercept*, Chief Executive Officer Twyla Carter said the resolution’s language was anti-Semitic. Staff could vote how they wanted, she said, but she had an obligation to warn them about the impact on the organization’s work.

Four law firms had already threatened to pull funding from the office over the resolution, Carter said. In discouraging Union members to vote for the statement. She said, “I’m not trying to lose a dime.” Akela Lacy’s article continues. “The legal fight revolved around a statement from the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys, UAW Local 2325, which covers more than 25 organizations, including the Bronx Defenders, Brooklyn Defender Services, neighborhood Defender Service, and the Legal Aid Society of New York City. Staffers across the four offices, as well as the New York County Defender Services, which is not represented by the union, have been retaliated against, reprimanded, surveilled, and encouraged to oppose the union resolution.

The resolution expresses solidarity with Palestinians, calls for a ceasefire in Gaza, and demands an end to Israel’s occupation, decrying apartheid, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. With a yes vote, the union would also oppose future military aid to Israel and endorse the boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement against Israel.

At the Legal Aid all staff meeting on Thursday, Carter, the CEO, said the resolution was anti-Semitic. “These statements call for the elimination of the state of Israel and the annihilation of the Jewish people,” Carter said. “You don’t have to agree, but that’s how some of our colleagues feel, and some of our supporters. Accusing Israel of being an apartheid state and of genocide are all dog whistles for

antisemitism,” she said. She suggested Jewish readers of the statement might see it the same way Black people would see pro-police sloganeering. “And again, as a Black woman, my closest analogy is hearing how people talk about Blue Lives Matter or other things that land on me differently.”

To wrap up my reading of Akela Lacy’s article, just two more passages here. “Several hours after the meeting on Thursday, attorneys at the Legal Aid Society of Nassau County sued in New York State Supreme Court to stop the vote, saying it posed an ethical dilemma for attorneys that would make it “impossible for them to properly do their job as public defenders.” On Friday, the court granted a temporary restraining order enjoining the vote. Voting had gotten underway at 9:00 AM and only 15 minutes were left on the clock when the injunction was issued. The tally never got underway.”

So that’s what we’re here to discuss. I apologize for the extended intro, but I thought it was important to just try as best as I could to lay out that information, and Akela has already laid it out in more depth than I could here in the intro. Again, we will link to that piece in the show notes. But more importantly, we’re going to turn to our guests who are in the thick of this struggle themselves. So we want to hear directly from them.

Now, Dany, Michael, Allie, again, really, really appreciate y’all coming on the show, especially as you are dealing with all of this crap, and really appreciate you being willing to come on, speak up, speak out, tell us your side of the story. I want to dig into the events of the past week with y’all, but first I wanted to just take a quick step back. Before we dig into the letter and the backlash, the injunction, I wanted to just remind folks a bit more about the kind of work that you do, and get to know a little more about you all and the struggles that you’ve been facing at ALAA over the past year. I’ll be totally upfront with folks and I’ll link to this video in the show notes, but I was at one of y’all’s picket lines in New York City earlier this year. I was invited out, I posted a video from the picket line to the *Real News Network* account. I even, myself, walked the picket line for a time. So that’s where I remembered y’all from. And then I heard about this current story, so I wanted to just connect those dots for folks listening.

Can we remind people about the work you do at your offices, the union struggle there, and the issues that y’all have been dealing with as workers, as legal aid workers up until October 7, 2023?

Michael Letwin: So our members work in a number of different agencies, either as public defenders or as other kinds of legal service workers. Public defenders, of course, represent people charged with crimes. And under *Gideon v Wainwright*, a Supreme Court decision from the ’60s, everybody charged with a crime, at least in theory, has the right to be represented by counsel. So in New York City, there’s no one governmental public defender’s office, what there are is contracts between the city and a number of different agencies, the biggest of which is Legal Aid Society, but also the other groups that we’ll mention here today. And so the members who work in public defense do entirely criminal defense work and of course that is extremely stressful, as you might imagine, especially for the people that we

represent who are being subject to the prison industrial complex and the New Jim Crow and all those kinds of things.

But we also have members who do other kinds of work, and some of those are landlord tenant lawyers who represent people who are facing loss of their homes or eviction, we represent either the parents of children or the children themselves sometimes in neglect and abuse cases as well as delinquency cases and a number of our members do immigration work to defend people who are being subject to that whole monstrosity, that horrific monstrosity. So those are some of the areas in which our people have worked and do the work every day. And of course, funding for those agencies is always under threat and never sufficient, and caseloads are always too high. And on top of that, we have to deal with very often anti-union managements of these different agencies. So those are some of the battles that we're involved with, both on behalf of our clients individually and collectively and for us as union members concerned with justice throughout the world.

Allie Goodman: As Michael said, the different shops, the different places, the different organizations rather have their own individual unions and we are working on getting all the different public defenders to become unionized. And some of us have contracts, some of us don't have contracts, so the strike that you're referencing, I'm not exactly positive which one it was, it might've been with one of the specific organizations that was striking at that time. But The Bronx Defenders like many different shops that are in the middle of trying to ratify contracts or are moving forward with different elements that they're fighting individually, so we have similar overall struggles, but then individually as organizations have different struggles. But overall, we're all fighting for people and putting people first and that's why this cause I think is so important to us as well.

Dany Greene: I can also talk a little bit more to connect our work, specifically why as public defenders we care about Palestine and why this is an issue that matters so much to all of us, and really it's the same reason we care about justice issues everywhere. We care because this is a genocide that's happening, and specifically it's a genocide that's being supported and legitimized by our government and by our media.

And as public defenders, like Michael said, we represent the most oppressed communities in the US. We see every day how the government legitimizes violence against our communities, through courts, through prisons, police deportation, family separation and more, and how that's supported by the media. And we know that those very same tactics are at work in Israel's 75-year occupation of Palestine and that that occupation is enforced by Israel's military and its increasingly fascist court system and that it's supported by US tax dollars. And so as public defenders that see the same things happening to our clients in a different way every single day, and we work in that system, we know that we need to stand against those same structures of oppression when they're happening elsewhere.

Michael Letwin: And if I could pick up where Dany just left off, also as union members, those same concerns because the genocide that's going on now in Palestine and has been going on for 75 years or more since the establishment of the Zionist state is something that unfortunately union officialdom in this country has supported for all these decades, going back in fact to at least the Balfour Declaration in 1917 in which the European colonial powers gave Palestine or promised Palestine to be a future Zionist state. So it's not a question of whether unions should be involved in this, unfortunately, unions have always been involved in this issue of Palestine, the problem is they've been on the wrong side for the most part.

And so as union members now, we are being called on by Palestinian trade unionists who have issued an urgent call for union members in this country, for workers everywhere to stand with them in demanding an end to the genocide, in demanding an end to the occupation, an end to the apartheid state, an end to US weapons for Israel and for workers themselves not to handle cargo for Israel, particularly military cargo. And so we think it's really essential to respect that picket line and that unions have to respect the picket line that have been set up by Palestinian trade unionists, just as we would respect any other picket line and every other picket line. Our job is to walk picket lines, not cross them. And so that's what we're trying to do here with our Palestine resolution in this union and more broadly, is to walk the Palestinian picket line with our Palestinian siblings.

Allie Goodman: The only thing that I would add to what Michael so beautifully stated, and I know we're going to get to the specific statements in a bit, but the only thing that I would add is that the call from Palestinian Trade Unions was a specific one that was sent out on the 16th, I believe, of October, a legitimate call from the Palestinian Trade Unions to, "End all forms of complicity with Israel's crimes." In the ways that Michael spoke about, and just in the ways that in speaking out about solidarity with Palestine and Palestinians generally. And so we think it's our duty as in all the ways that Michael stated as union members and as people of moral conscience to speak out and to comply with the forms of being in a union and being in solidarity with other union members, and also particularly in the ways in which Palestinians themselves are calling for, because that so often is ignored in how people can show up. And right now we are getting an explicit call from people in Palestine to show up in this exact way.

Maximillian Alvarez: Well let's zero in on that. Let's talk about Gaza and what's been going on over there within the union and these different shops that are part of the union. And I want to just ask y'all, if you could tell us more about the discussions that y'all have been having within your own workplaces within your union, what you've been feeling as legal workers and rank and file union members over the past month and a half, and also just as human beings watching all of this genocidal madness unfold in real time. And I want to ask if you could talk more specifically about how the resolution, the statement came together, why y'all felt it was important to put out that statement, what is in it? We will link to the draft in the show notes, but yeah, just talk us through the timeline of how this statement came together

and why y'all wrote it the way that you did and what role you think unions can and should be playing right now in forcing a ceasefire and ending this violence and slaughter.

Allie Goodman: Mm-hmm. A really important and big question. I'm going to actually walk us backwards. I work at The Bronx Defenders and my union specifically came out with a statement I believe in the middle of October, I think it was October 17th or 18th, maybe the 19th. But it was very shortly after the call specifically from Palestinian Trade Unions came out. Some folks at my union drafted a really beautiful statement in solidarity with Palestinians and naming the genocidal violence that's happening and specifically stating that as people of mortal conscience, but also as workers, we were going to fall in line and follow the lead of Palestinian Trade Unions.

And since that time, we received pushback from all different levels of people, people in our courts. And we can speak more on this later perhaps, but in general, I think that it's helpful background because after that it became clear that, as we all know, as people who are workers, there is safety and solidarity and safety in numbers and it felt important for the rest of our union to also most importantly speak on the genocidal violence that Palestinians are and have been experiencing for at new rates for the past over 40 days of bombs reigning in Gaza, increased violence in the West Bank, but also for 75 years of colonial occupation, and then also in order to stand in solidarity with our union at the Bronx Defenders and protect us all together collectively.

Michael Letwin: Allie explained very well the history of this in recent times. I guess I just want to take a step back and start from an earlier point, which is that there's a long history of more than two decades really of battling around Palestinian rights and the right to even express a pro-Palestinian point of view and an anti-genocidal point of view in our union and especially at The Legal Aid Society, which again, is the largest of these institutions, of the employers. And that history really starts with immediately after 9/11 of 2001 when a number of us started an effort called New York City Labor Against the War and issued a statement less than a week or so after 9/11, calling for what it sounds like to oppose the US war that was going to be unleashed, and that was unleashed both abroad in places like Afghanistan and Iraq and Palestine and also at home in terms of the attack on Muslim people, on people of color, generally, on civil liberties and free speech.

And so in the wake of that, a number of us came under intense attack from within our own ranks of the union, a small number of people, but nonetheless very vocal, who condemned us for taking that position and basically tried to get The Legal Aid Society, the employer, to shut down any kind of advocacy against the war for Palestine. And in fact, for years there was a battle that went on between these Zionist members of the union who tried to shut down any anti-war or pro-Palestinian speech, both at The Legal Aid Society, by the employer, and even went to outside agencies and people to try to get a threat of funding deprived to the agency if they continued to allow and didn't shut down and totally censor this kind of speech.

And you have to understand, this is an agency where, and in a union, which traditionally has discussed everything in anything under the sun, including on the email system where anything could be said. And yet the one thing that couldn't be said apparently was Palestine. And that is not true just in our situation, that's the whole so-called Palestine exception to free speech that is out there. And that is, if anything, the most intense right now as we can see in this temporary restraining order against our resolution being voted on.

So skipping ahead then, however, over the years people persevered and our union continued to speak about Palestine, issued numerous statements to that effect in a defense of free speech. And then finally, in the wake of one of the earlier wars on Gaza, since there's been so many, since 2008, 2009, in 2022, our union membership adopted a Palestine solidarity resolution, a very strong resolution, which called for BDS, called for the UAW to divest from Israel bonds and which was passed by 75% of the membership voting, which is a huge landslide, far greater than you could ever hope for in almost any situation.

And then more recently before our resolution was brought this year in our local, there was a rank and file BDS resolution that was formulated by other people in other UAW places calling on, in response to the Palestinian call issued on October 16th that Allie had mentioned, and that resolution is a sign-on statement, which calls on the UAW in particular to end its support for genocide and to condemn the genocide, and to divest from bonds and all those other things and join BDS. And finally then on the heels of all of that, and on the heels of October 7th, came this resolution that we're now being stopped from voting on. And that resolution, again, is very strong, very much in the same voice as our 2022 resolution that was overwhelmingly adopted.

And the point, I think, about all this is that, like throughout society there is such growing support for Palestinians and that Israel has so de-legitimized itself, especially in regard to the brutalization of Gaza. I mean, it's Guernica all over again. It's the Warsaw Ghetto all over again. It's Soweto. It's any number of places you can think up historic analogies. And it's so clear that this is genocidal and unjust, and so because of that huge outpouring, and we can see 300,000 people marched in Washington just a couple of weeks ago for Palestine, because of that, the only response that the Zionist or pro-Israeli forces have is to silence and to intimidate and to blacklist and to fire, all the things that are now going on to anybody who speaks up for Palestine.

Because they can't defend the indefensible. They can't win the argument. They can't convince people in a democratic process not to vote for a resolution like this. The only thing they can do is threaten our funding, go to the court to shut down the democracy and to enable Israeli genocide, and that's what we're facing here.

Maximillian Alvarez: Well, and I really, really appreciate that breakdown. I think it really underscores one of the things that I really wanted to communicate to listeners in this episode, and that

we've been trying to communicate with other interviews that I've been doing here, on the Real News, at Breaking Points, everywhere else. I've been running myself ragged trying to cover this as much as I can. But this is a worker issue on so many levels. This is, at base, a humanity issue. We, as human beings, what kind of world are we expected to give to our children? How can we look our children in the face? How can we even look towards a future and think it's one worth living in where humanity has shown itself capable of just accepting this and doing nothing while our fellow human beings are slaughtered en masse, while futures are stolen, children are murdered and left to die in incubators?

Again, that's where we got to start, is just from a basic human perspective, from the side of life, we need to be speaking out against this and fighting for justice and peace as much as possible. But also, as you've heard from the conversation so far, this is fundamentally a labor issue. Not only because our fellow unionists in Palestine have put out this call to workers and unions around the world to oppose the violence of Israeli occupation, the genocidal onslaught in Gaza, to use our power as workers to bring an end to this madness. And at the same time, everything that we're talking about here is a worker issue.

Your boss and the sort of... I mean, workers getting censored from releasing a statement, the kind of censorship that we're talking about. We're not even talking about the many instances of censorship and repression that we've been hearing about for weeks across the country. People getting fired from their jobs, people having promotions rescinded, people getting doxxed, even students getting doxxed just for showing up at a rally, not speaking at it. The pressure, the intense pressure, coming from the donor class and certain members within it to push universities to crack down on free speech as well, right? I mean, if workers and unions cannot harness our collective power to stand up for the right to free speech, what movement do we have left? And so I think that that's also really important to underline here.

And I want to sort of talk about how this is playing out for y'all, and has been playing out over the past week, kind of building on the great breakdown that Michael gave us. I wanted to sort of ask if we could, again, walk listeners through how this has unfolded. As the statement came together, as y'all were preparing to vote on the resolution to release this statement. And were people at different offices being called in and told that you shouldn't do this by your employers, and that you're going to lose funding, and then having an injunction slapped on you like... Like, this is wild. I know I've heard about similar things to this, but I was struggling to sort of think of a similar situation where a union was enjoined to not even complete voting on a resolution to release a statement. That's pretty wild to me. So can you guys break that timeline down for us a little bit more and talk about just the past week specifically for people listening to this?

Dany Greene: So as Allie explained earlier, our union, ALAA, is composed of 25 different shops. And so various members from those different shops came together to create the resolution and to write the resolution. And then that resolution, once it was written, in support of Palestine, was brought to the joint council. And that joint council consists of leaders from each of the shops who meet on occasions to

vote through resolutions and do other union activities. So that resolution was brought to the joint council, and that meeting was on November 14th when the joint council met, and they overwhelmingly voted in favor of bringing that resolution to a wider membership vote. The vote was 108 to 13 to 8. And then they set that membership vote for November 17th. But between November 14th, which was the Tuesday, to November 17th, the Friday, a lot happened, and I can walk us through that.

First LAS, the Legal Aid Society, their management made a public statement and held a town hall meeting for all employees at the Legal Aid Society. That statement was put out on November 16th, one day before our scheduled union vote. And in the statement, and in that town hall, they smeared the resolution. They called it antisemitic, threatened that it would lead to a loss of funding for the organization, and strongly discouraged members from voting in favor of the resolution. The New York Legal Assistance Group, NYLAG, their management also released a very similar statement the following day. So on the day of our vote. In that statement, they again urged members to vote no, they blasted the resolution as antisemitic, and they threatened that it would cause the organization to lose funding.

At the same time as this is all happening on this interference from management, there was a group of four attorneys who are union members from the Legal Aid Society of Nassau County that sued in the New York State Supreme Court to stop our resolution from going to a vote. They filed that lawsuit on Thursday afternoon, and rather than just voting no for the resolution, they resorted to this as an attack on our union democracy.

The vote started as planned on November 17th, the Friday, but 15 minutes before the vote closed and a tally began, a Nassau County Supreme Court judge issued a blatantly unconstitutional temporary restraining order, which barred our union from completing the vote. We strongly oppose the fearmongering that management took place in their attempts to silence us, as well as the blatantly anti-union and anti-democratic actions of just four members preventing this vote from continuing. And I know we want to speak to each of those points more in depth. I believe that Allie can speak a little bit more to funding now.

Allie Goodman: Thanks Dany. So yeah, I think one important thing is that most of the conversations to get us to stop speaking out on behalf of Palestinians and in favor of justice have been about funding and have been about threats to funding, and as Dany called it, fearmongering.

But it is important to note that funding and money, historically, has gone hand in hand with promoting genocide. People who are in leading roles at universities, funding politicians, people who are in positions of power with the ability to determine who gets money or what gets money often play really big roles in controlling speech and in controlling war and genocide and profiting off of it, as you stated earlier, Maximillian, which was a really wonderful point. And so we're sort of responding in response to that, first of all. Twyla had indicated previously at a meeting with Legal Aid attorneys that something

along the lines of how we wanted to be aligned with law firms, because law firms give us the money to do discretionary things at our different union shops. But we explicitly do not want to be morally aligned with law firms. More often than not, that is not our goal. And I think that's important to remember, as you keep highlighting, as working people.

And really importantly, we are a group of public defense offices. So the truth is that the government needs us. We are protecting people's constitutional rights, as Michael stated. Their right to the custody and control of their children, their right to liberty, their right to freedom and justice. And our system of governance requires us, as public defenders, in order to even keep up the veneer or facade of justice in our systems that could only resemble justice with us being in the roles that we are. So conditioning our funding on silence about issues that matter to us is in line with fascism and McCarthyism and we should all take extreme issue and actively fight against this, for ourselves and our clients and for humanity, honestly.

And I, ultimately, and I think we all here, refuse to legitimize the fearmongering around money and funding for that exact reason. Curtailing our rights as union workers and as people, and our First Amendment rights generally, which I know Michael will speak more about, that's something that we refuse to believe as a legitimate threat. Unless if the government is prepared to accept their status as fascist McCarthyists. And so the problem is not our speech, but their attempts to unjustly intimidate us out of speaking.

Dany Greene: I also want to talk about the management's attempts to silence us through their dangerous conflation of antisemitism and anti-Zionism. Many of our union members, including Allie, Michael, and I, are all Jewish anti-Zionists. And LAS and NYLAG specifically, their management has attempted to silence our union in our critiques of Israel by mislabeling them as antisemitic. At the Legal Aid Society meeting, when pushed by members to identify any antisemitic statement in the resolution, LAS management pointed to this language. "One, in the occupation of Palestine, and two, we stand for human rights and against apartheid, ethnic cleansing and genocide."

Twyla Carter, the CEO of LAS, called these dog whistles for antisemitism. But they're not. They're far from being antisemitic and they're language that aligns with human rights organizations across the world in their assessment of Israel's conduct in Palestine. Our resolution expresses opposition to the actions of the state of Israel and those of the United States. And the state of Israel is distinct from the religious or ethnic identity of Jews, and to assert otherwise conflates a government with its people and it's incorrect and it's dangerous. Legal Aid Society and NYLAG, in their management, they misrepresented the definition of antisemitism, both publicly and in the workplace, and in doing this, they impeded our work for justice and they've endangered our communities. They attempted to silence our union members who support Palestine, again, many of whom are Jewish. We also strongly oppose the statement that LAS CEO Twyla Carter made when she stated that advocating for free Palestine is equivalent to stating that Blue Lives Matter. In our fight for Palestinian liberation, we also fight for

racial justice and against antisemitism, and we reject any claim that they're mutually exclusive. All of these fights for justice go hand in hand and be do them simultaneously.

Maximillian Alvarez: Man, that one gets me. All of this gets me, but I've seen some shit in my day for management, and this sort of faux progressive weaponization of identity politics and other nominally sounding progressive issues to bust unions, to suppress workers' rights, that is next level. And I'm speaking for myself here. I'm not speaking for anyone else on the call. This is me, Max, the host, opining on that.

But it reminds me of when we interviewed workers at No Evil Foods, a vegan meat alternative producer in North Carolina a couple of years ago, and the pseudo progressive punk rock looking owners who had tattoos and piercings. I got the recordings from the captive audience meetings they held to bust their union drive, and they were using all these faux left talking points saying that, "We're a vegan company that believes in a meatless future, and you guys want to unionize with the UFCW who also represent meat packing workers, and so you're undercutting the mission," just cherry-picking so many things to ultimately, in the grand scheme of things, the whole goal was to bust the union drive. The whole goal was to strip away workers' rights.

So I'm not conflating these two instances. I'm comparing them in that regard that bosses can use so many different mechanisms to try to ultimately achieve the same end, which is get their workers to shut the hell up and stay in line and not exercise their own rights. And that is wrong regardless of the situation, but especially in a situation like this where we are literally with our own eyes watching the extermination of a people, and we are being told it's anti-Semitic to say anything about it. That's fucking ridiculous. Pardon my French. Again, I'm just speaking for myself. I don't want to get anyone in trouble, but I've been bottling this up for the past 48 hours after learning about what y'all are going through, and it is blowing my god-damn mind.

And again, we're talking about a McCarthyite situation here where people are getting fired for even liking stuff on social media. Just the repressive nature of this is so intense, and working people and people of conscience everywhere have to fight against that because if we lose that battle now, if you give up your ability to exercise those rights, you are not going to get them back without a hell of a fight. And so for many, many reasons, everyone listening to this should stand up and oppose what is happening here. Because if it's not happening at your shop, I promise you it will come to your shop if we all stand idly by and let this happen.

And so I want to end on that note. I wanted to turn things over to y'all one more time. I know that we've already gone over a little bit. I don't want to keep you for too much longer, but I just wanted to ask what happens now? Where do things stand? Again, we're recording this on Sunday, November 19th. We're going to try to turn this around for tomorrow as quickly as we can. But as Dany said, a shit ton happened in the span of three days last week, so I'm going to hedge my bets here and say that a lot could happen

in the next 24, 48, 72 hours. So I guess what happens now and where do things stand now? What can other unions, what can other workers, what can other people of conscience do to support y'all in this fight?

Michael Letwin: Well, I'll just start by saying that the temporary restraining order against our union, silencing our union, on speaking out on a human rights issue and a liberation issue, and an anti-genocide issue especially, is truly unprecedented, at least in modern times. There was a time when there were no free speech rights at all in this country, really, and where unions were even illegal until basically the end of the 19th century and still had to fight all kinds of battles ever since, including battles in which lots of workers were killed by the employers or the state. But in modern times, to have a court of all places in Nassau County Supreme Court, which is the trial-level court in New York State, for them to issue a prior restraint, prior censorship against political speech by a union, or for that matter, anybody else, is just absolutely groundless in terms of the law. It's a blatant violation of the First Amendment. The only time I'm aware of in recent times, recent years, modern times, when a court even issued an injunction against the union for making it for speech was around 1999, 2000 during the transit workers' negotiations in New York City. And I remember going to court with the Transit Workers Union on behalf of our union and opposing a temporary restraining order, which forbade the union, that union, from taking a vote to authorize a strike at the New York Transit Authority. And the basis for that, although that was also blatantly unconstitutional, but at least the grounds for that was that going on strike for those workers is illegal under the Taylor Law in New York State, a horrible anti-union law.

And so that should of course never have been issued. It was like the injunction against the Memphis sanitation workers in 1968 that the court there ordered same time that Reverend Martin Luther King was assassinated. But at least, again, they had the hook there, that what was being voted on was to advocate or even authorize what was purportedly an illegal job action. Here, this is purely political speech. And again, not to defend what the court did there, but to say this is even worse, because here all that's being voted on is something that doesn't even have to do with collective bargaining directly. It's not about an issue at work, although actually it is because of the silencing and the censorship. But that's not primarily even what this resolution was about. And even if it was, we have the right to say so.

So, to have this court issue this injunction, and not just an injunction, but a temporary restraining order, in other words, basically an ex parte that means that we didn't have the right to be heard before this was ordered, is just absolutely unheard of, and I think it's very much part of the times that we're facing now. This is post 9/11 all over again. This is McCarthyism all over again. This is the Red Scare all over again. This is becoming COINTELPRO all over again from the 1960s, the notorious FBI program to attack the Black Liberation Movement in particular. And so it's essential, we think, to oppose this. We will oppose this. We will not be silenced. As we say in one of our press releases, we will prevail here. We will vote, we will pass the resolution and Palestine will be free, not just because of us, but with our support and our strong intervention to the degree that we can.

And in that regard, I would just ask people to do a number of things. One is... Or actually, Allie, do you want to address this? Okay. Sorry. Let me take that apart. Start back. So we would ask people to do a number of things themselves. One is, if you're in a union, get your union, bring a resolution to get your union to respond to the call of Palestinian trade unionists for a ceasefire, yes, but not just a ceasefire. For the liberation of Palestine and for the end to the Zionist regime that exists there, and that stops people from being free, so that we have a society in Palestine with liberation for Palestine from the river to the sea with equal rights for all. That's what we're talking about ultimately here.

And secondly, to bring that resolution of your union, to get your union to divest from Israel bonds, to call for those different things, to support the BDS movement. And we'd also ask UAW members to sign on to the rank and file UAW BDS statement that's out there. You can find it online. Whatever union you're in, to sign on to the Labor for Palestine statement posted at laborforpalestine.net, which upholds the Palestinian Trade Union call. And to take these steps now so that we can look at ourselves in the face, both as union members, as workers, and as human beings.

Allie Goodman: I'll also just provide our email that we've created alaaforpalestine@gmail.com. alaaforpalestine@gmail.com. If you are in a union, if you're trying to form a union, everyone should try and form a union. But in general, we would be happy to support other union shops in coming up with statements and figuring out how you too can stand in solidarity with Palestinian trade unions and Palestinians generally, and support Palestinian liberation and liberation for us all.

Michael Letwin: If I could just add one thing, you may not have use for this, but I just want to call attention to the fact that already, workers around the world are refusing to handle Israeli cargo, in particular, dockers. And even in this country, a couple of weeks ago, a block the boat campaign, which is coordinated by the Air Resources and Organizing Center in the Bay Area, with support of ILWU local 10 dock workers, refused to handle Israeli cargo. It was coming on a Zim line ship into Oakland, and then refused to handle it when that ship fled to Tacoma because it couldn't get unloaded in Oakland. And this reflects an ongoing block the boat campaign that started in 2014, in which for the past almost 10 years, has kept Israeli ships away from the West Coast. So these are the kinds of actions, the direct actions, that we can be taking in all kinds of ways to support Palestinian trade unionists and Palestinian people generally. Its resolutions are critical and the fight for free speech is critical, but ultimately it's that kind of direct action by workers at their jobs that can make all the difference.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Labor for Palestine [website](#) and [Twitter/X](#) page

- Association of Legal Aid Attorneys, United Auto Workers Local 2325, “[Resolution Calling for a Ceasefire in Gaza, an End to the Israeli Occupation of Palestine, and Support for Workers’ Political Speech](#)“
- Akela Lacy, *The Intercept*, “[Public Defenders Get Restraining Order to Block Their Own Union from Voting on Gaza Statement](#)“
- Jake Johnson, *Common Dreams*, “[Bar Association Urged to Fight Censorship of Pro-Palestinian Voices](#)“

Permanent links below...

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- *In These Times* [website](#), [Facebook](#) page, and [Twitter](#) page
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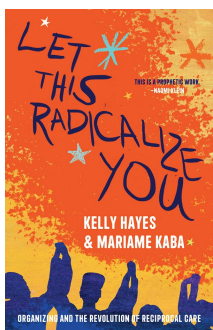
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