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01/08/2024



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A RANK-AND-FILE
NEWSLETTER

The Campaign for a BDS Referendum in UAW 2865



The genocide in Gaza grinds on. Over 30,000 Palestinians have been murdered so far, including more than 11,000 children. Some 57,000 have been injured, thousands more buried beneath the rubble, and 1.9 million (nearly 85% of the total population) forcibly displaced.

The Zionist regime has made a policy of targeting hospitals, schools, journalists, and humanitarian organizations. It has destroyed every university in Gaza and assassinated multiple university professors and presidents. Meanwhile, universities in the US, at the behest of the political establishment, have leveled baseless accusations of antisemitism at their students in order to justify attacks on free speech, policing of protests, and the blacklisting of student groups.

At the University of California, students have mobilized in defense of Palestine and have worked to expose the university's investments in war profiteers. Our union, UAW 2865, must build rank-and-file participation in these efforts, alongside our community and movement partners. This requires deep rank-and-file political education and a long-term escalation plan. During the last UCLA Monthly Membership Meeting, in November, our Rank-and-File Caucus proposed the first step in this longer-term escalation plan: A statewide local referendum endorsing BDS.

Why Hold a Statewide Referendum?

Union referendums are important tools for rank-and-file organizing, allowing the membership to take clear, concrete, and powerful actions. Meaningful referendums provide clear motivation for political education and involvement. They increase organizing

Impactful referendums are independent membership actions, not leadership approval polls. To be meaningful, referendums must be actionable, directly relevant, and material to the membership. The text of the referendum should concisely communicate its objective, context, action, and the ramifications of voting "yes" or "no." Finally, the referendum's wording should be reflective of the membership, with member comments being actively considered and debated prior to the referendum itself.

The democratic process is as important as the referendum's wording. Referendums must provide sufficient time for political education, advocacy, and deliberation. The outcome shouldn't be predetermined by union leadership; time and space must be provided for open forums and wide discussions in the membership and should provide equal opportunity for "yes" and "no" votes.

The 2014 Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Resolution (which provided the model for the Rank-and-File Caucus plan) is a powerful example of a meaningful effort. The referendum's passage made an impact in our union and even beyond, due to the unprecedented level of rank-and-file participation, commitment to political education, and coordination with Palestine movement partners.

What is the Jan 8-9 referendum?

At the start of winter break, the UAW 2865 Executive Board announced a statewide membership referendum on whether to endorse their statement for "a ceasefire and lasting peace" in Palestine.

The proposed referendum is to be held on the first two days of the Winter Quarter. Such short notice precludes the possibility of organizing a political education campaign to engage and inform membership on the content of the vote. Limiting the voting time to two days will also exclude some members' voices. Note, by contrast, the months-long educational campaign and 7-day voting period for the recent amalgamation referendum.

Months ago, three campuses (UCLA, UCSB, and UCD) debated and voted on [resolutions](#) at their membership meetings calling for a BDS referendum. These resolutions committed to:

1. Sign on as UAW 2865-UCLA to the [UAW rank-and-file call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions \(BDS\)](#).
2. Organize with other UC campuses to sign onto the above letter as the entire UAW 2865 local.
3. Hold a membership-wide asynchronous vote to endorse BDS.

Our local's leadership opposed these plans and repeatedly attempted to limit discussion of the Gaza crisis to a liberalized "ceasefire and peace" narrative that requires no concrete action by the union.

However, these resolutions were passed by overwhelming margins. Rank-and-file groups then repeatedly tried to publicize them to our fellow union members, but local leadership consistently stonewalled, and all three resolutions remain unpublished, in what is a direct attack on the democratic rights of the membership.

The Executive Board opted not to hold Monthly Membership Meetings in December, and then announced this referendum as a *fait accompli*, with rank-and-file members excluded from the drafting process.

The ballot text is vague and unclear. It summarizes past actions and statements by

the UAW and asks members whether they wish to "affirm the actions and positions" that have already been taken with a blanket "yes" or "no." Most importantly, it contains nothing actionable. The demand for BDS is consigned to a footnote and couched in vague language.

In short, this "referendum" is a cynical attempt to co-opt and defuse the efforts for a serious referendum. Its overriding purpose is to take back the initiative from the rank-and-file and give leadership a "victory" which they can use to claim membership approval and fend off further challenges.

Nevertheless, our Rank-and-File Caucus will assist in efforts to pass this referendum, and we recognize that its failure would be a significant setback. But our larger goal remains to ignite a campaign against the UC's implicit endorsement of genocide, and to take up the fight for BDS begun by our local in 2014.

We therefore demand that the E-Board:

1. Publicize the BDS resolutions passed by membership votes.
2. Work toward a serious referendum on the issue of BDS and reject the nullification by the IEB of the 2014 vote.
3. Prepare contract language to put concrete BDS demands on the bargaining table in our union's negotiation with the UC in 2025.

Our caucus will continue to work toward these goals, including by organizing a political education campaign on BDS, in close collaboration with UC Divest and our other partners. To join these efforts, contact us at organize@uclarnf.org.

■ **FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA** ■
PALESTINE WILL BE FREE