

# TEMPEST

## Vermonters' solidarity with Palestine

How we've been organizing

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by **Helen Scott**

*Tempest member **Helen Scott** describes the successes and challenges of founding a new coalition in Vermont, and the importance of building democratic spaces for organizing.*

A new statewide coalition, **[Vermont Coalition for Palestinian Liberation](https://www.instagram.com/vermontcpl/)** (<https://www.instagram.com/vermontcpl/>), has formed with eight sponsoring groups: Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), Cooperation Vermont, Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), Tempest Collective, Vermonters for Justice in Palestine (VTJP), and Vermont Peace Antiwar Coalition (VPAC).

Organizing decisions are made at regular in-person meetings: Meetings are usually held in Burlington, which has the highest population density in the state, but also in Barre in central Vermont because the coalition is statewide. Attendance at meetings has been between 60 and 80 people. The group is diverse and largely young. In practice it has been collaborative and has maintained good energy.

The coalition has an organizational structure that was worked out democratically during the first two meetings. There is a steering committee made of representatives from each of the sponsoring groups and each of the working groups. We have four working groups: campaigns, actions, education, and labor for Palestine. These working groups meet in person in breakouts from the general meetings and on zoom in between, with communication occurring mostly on Signal.

The coalition has organized several protests, including a large march in Burlington and a rally at the state house in Montpelier, the state capital. These have been sponsored by a half dozen groups in addition to the coalition, including an AFSCME local and Migrant Justice.

The coalition also mobilized people to testify in support of a ceasefire resolution at Burlington City Hall, and campaigned to get an Apartheid Free Burlington resolution on the ballot for the March election. Although the resolution secured the requisite number of signatures, Zionists both inside and outside the council blocked it from getting on the ballot.



# TEACH-IN ON PALESTINE

**Saturday, Feb. 3 from 2-5 p.m.**  
Followed by dinner provided by People's Kitchen  
**Old North End Community Center**  
**20 Allen Street, Burlington**

▶ Sponsored by the Vermont  
Coalition for Palestinian Liberation



Join us for a quick workshop discussion on

- Settler colonialism
- Israeli occupation
- Apartheid in Palestine
- Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions
- The Apartheid Free Community campaign in Burlington, which will be on the March 5th ballot

Social media flier advertising the coalition's teach-in. Image by [Vermont Coalition for Palestinian Liberation](https://www.instagram.com/vermontcpl/) (<https://www.instagram.com/vermontcpl/>).

The coalition has organized a “Learn about Palestine” study group series which meets in person with a Zoom option each month. January’s study meeting was on the first half of [Essays for a Free Palestine: From the River to the Sea](https://www.haymarketbooks.org/books/2370-from-the-river-to-the-sea). (<https://www.haymarketbooks.org/books/2370-from-the-river-to-the-sea>) Proposals for future events include Angela Davis’ *Freedom is a Constant Struggle* and Ilan Pappé’s *Ten Myths About Israel*.

The coalition has also planned a [teach-in for early February](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeSCUHR44cmKE-PKuXJPZplXmfxHPXBHpKRLYBzylIh1L69MQ/viewform) (<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeSCUHR44cmKE-PKuXJPZplXmfxHPXBHpKRLYBzylIh1L69MQ/viewform>). The teach-in will include three sections: Occupation and settler colonialism; apartheid; BDS and related campaigns. It will be held on a Saturday afternoon in a local community center with a dinner afterwards provided by The People's Kitchen.

## Backstory

At the first protest after Israel started its bombardment of Gaza, various local organizers met and strategized about working together. Tempest quickly organized a forum, "Stop Israel's Genocidal War," with speakers from VTJP, JVP and Tempest. The forum had great attendance including from key local leaders. From that there followed another protest in Burlington. During the protest we distributed information about an organizing meeting and announced it from the front of the demonstration. Someone also collected emails from everyone in attendance and a message was sent out announcing the organizing meeting. Around 75 people attended, and the coalition was founded.

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The coalition has diverse representation, including Palestinians and Bosnians and others who deepen our global perspective.

The coalition collectively drew up a list of demands, which were discussed, revised, and approved by unanimous vote in subsequent meetings. These demands are listed below.

The following month Tempest hosted a Labor for Palestine meeting. The speakers were a member of JVP, a young local union organizer, and a Tempest member. At that meeting we launched Vermont Labor for Palestine (VL4P), and subsequently formally signed on to the national group of the same name. VL4P then became one of the working groups of the coalition. The important thing to note here is that the coalition remains a hub for all of the organizing work. This is key to developing the democratic infrastructures that the movement will require to win.

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## Challenges and strategies

Challenges include the chilling impact of the new McCarthyism and a fear of doxxing. We also face a constant behind-the-scenes campaign from Zionists on and off the city council, and people obviously feel the daily horror of watching Israel's genocide continue with the full support of the US political establishment against the will of the majority and despite our sustained protests.

We also have faced and responded to various questions around organizing:

- 1. Security culture conservatism. Some argued that we shouldn't announce our meetings at rallies or widely publicize due to concerns about getting the wrong people at our meetings (disruptive, untrustworthy, etc.). The winning argument was that we should broadly announce and publicize the coalition meetings everywhere we could and encourage others to do so. Also that running meetings democratically and with attention to possible disruptors is best practice and, in truth, all we can do. Now there is generally a culture of, "of course, we publicize our meetings and invite new people. No one needs to be vetted."*

2. *Battle-scarred reluctance. While some established activists initially doubted the possibilities of the moment, the coalition has shown in practice that we can grow, people will commit over the long term, and we need to be outward.*
3. *Organizing culture and practices, particularly in the running of meetings. Certain principles have come to the fore in the coalition: Generally saying yes to all the ideas people have for organizing; no to leadership deciding things outside open meetings; no power points, and very few pre-planned ideas about where new people should end up after meetings. Instead, a focus on taking up work in the coalition meetings and having a sense of shared ownership.*

## Coalition Demands

- Ceasefire now
- Stop Israel's genocide and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians
- Provide unrestricted humanitarian aid to all Palestinians
- Free all Palestinian prisoners and hostages
- Defend the civil rights of Palestinians and Palestine solidarity activists
- Stop all U.S. aid to Israel
- Enforce boycott, divestment, and sanctions against Israel
- End Israel's siege, occupation, and apartheid system
- Support Palestinians' right to self-determination, right to return, and equal rights

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