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## For Palestine Solidarity, Bay Area Union Members Step Up and Dig In

March 05, 2024 / Bahaar Tadjbakhsh

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After California Senator Alex Padilla voted yes on an additional \$14.1 billion in military aid to Israel in February, union members occupied Padilla's San Francisco office to demand a permanent ceasefire. Photo: Brooke Anderson @movementphotographer

When street protests seem ignored by the war machine, what are union members to do?

In the San Francisco Bay Area, unions and rank-and-file networks are using direct action and endorsement-revoking campaigns to target the politicians who are still shipping weapons to Israel for its scorched-earth campaign. Meanwhile we've held a teach-in and launched campaigns to boycott Israeli goods and divest our pensions from the occupation.

Nearly six months in, Israel's invasion of Gaza is responsible for 30,000 Palestinian deaths and counting. Across the U.S., more than 100 union locals, six internationals, and the AFL-CIO have called for a ceasefire.

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Nonetheless, many have continued to endorse and donate to the candidates who are sponsoring arms for the war, including President Joe Biden.

Palestine solidarity organizers in the [Communications Workers](https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/no-ceasefire-no-votes) (<https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/no-ceasefire-no-votes>), [National Education Association](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf6lF5q_CYsich-hJMWb0BqKO7T66JRW8zYzYBy8vy-emSNAg/viewform) ([https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf6lF5q\\_CYsich-hJMWb0BqKO7T66JRW8zYzYBy8vy-emSNAg/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf6lF5q_CYsich-hJMWb0BqKO7T66JRW8zYzYBy8vy-emSNAg/viewform)), and the [Auto Workers](https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vQ-l2E0sn1nFnmVnIVkgOiwE_HYHuDhFDcpENlaqvc7Lq1JhQjXTiGBmJI4g8Vw261sta47xjG2xWpub?urp=gmail_link) ([https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vQ-l2E0sn1nFnmVnIVkgOiwE\\_HYHuDhFDcpENlaqvc7Lq1JhQjXTiGBmJI4g8Vw261sta47xjG2xWpub?urp=gmail\\_link](https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vQ-l2E0sn1nFnmVnIVkgOiwE_HYHuDhFDcpENlaqvc7Lq1JhQjXTiGBmJI4g8Vw261sta47xjG2xWpub?urp=gmail_link)) have called on their executive boards to withdraw Biden endorsements until their demands are met. Last week, Food and Commercial Workers Local 3000, the largest union in Washington state and largest UFCW local in the country, announced [that it would support “uncommitted” over Biden in the primary](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-election/washington-states-largest-labor-union-endorses-uncommitted-biden-rcna141139) (<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-election/washington-states-largest-labor-union-endorses-uncommitted-biden-rcna141139>).

A groundswell of union Palestine activism in the Bay Area has gone further. In February, after Senator Alex Padilla voted yes on an additional \$14.1 billion in military aid to Israel, union members and officers from SEIU United Service Workers West, AFSCME Local 3299, SEIU Local 1021, Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE) Local 21, UNITE HERE Local 2, and the Oakland Education Association (OEA) [occupied](https://m.facebook.com/UniteHereL2/videos/union-members-came-to-senator-alex-padillas-office-to-demand-his-support-for-a-c/948141787028079/) (<https://m.facebook.com/UniteHereL2/videos/union-members-came-to-senator-alex-padillas-office-to-demand-his-support-for-a-c/948141787028079/>) Padilla’s San Francisco office to demand a permanent ceasefire.

## ESCALATING TACTICS

In many of the largest Bay Area unions, solidarity organizers are testing out creative ways to bring co-workers in and apply pressure.

A budding Healthcare Workers for Palestine network has held rallies at several hospitals, with Palestinian and Arab-American workers taking prominent roles.

Teachers in Oakland passed a [motion](https://docs.google.com/document/d/149wOLzx7_bW-Pe0k9aDdoKyyvGHEGh6MCemD6pOMQqeM/edit) ([https://docs.google.com/document/d/149wOLzx7\\_bW-Pe0k9aDdoKyyvGHEGh6MCemD6pOMQqeM/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/149wOLzx7_bW-Pe0k9aDdoKyyvGHEGh6MCemD6pOMQqeM/edit)) urging the state and national NEA to revoke its endorsement of Biden, until he calls for a permanent ceasefire.

Longshore and Warehouse (ILWU) Local 10 gathered members and supporters at a weekend forum at its union hall February 24, around the theme “Workers’ action can stop the war in Gaza.” The local is famed for boycotting and blockading ships from apartheid South Africa and, in recent decades, honoring community pickets to not unload ships moving cargo for a major Israeli company.

**Strips Out Tiers**  
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California has long been a hub of the weapons industry and the research that backs it up. In science labs across the University of California system, Auto Workers (UAW) Local 2865 members have organized under the banner of Researchers Against War.

“We started to meet weekly to figure out what kind of actions we would take,” said Douglas Grion Filho, a researcher in an astronomy lab at UC Santa Cruz. “We wrote a letter (<https://scienceforthepeople.org/2024/01/17/ucsc-astronomy-rejects-researchers-complicity-with-the-genocide-of-palestine/>) to express our commitment to withhold our labor from military-funded research.”

“What worked best to mobilize people was having a small nucleus of co-workers to talk to in a low-stakes setting,” said Isabel Kain, a researcher from the same campus. “We talked in sober and fact-based ways about the entanglements between the science that we love and its misuse by the military.”



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“I care about my research, and this connection keeps me up at night.”

## **WORKSHOPS FOR THE LONG HAUL**

After five months of protests and resolutions, on February 25 the Bay Area Labor for Palestine

([https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfub\\_REg96PDR8VnsyPIhcQrvN9atV7eAVhNZ43TNhtX7QntA/vi](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfub_REg96PDR8VnsyPIhcQrvN9atV7eAVhNZ43TNhtX7QntA/vi)) network held a day of workshops attended by more than 300. The meetings focused on building long-term solidarity campaigns within our unions.

“I’m here because I believe the labor movement needs to take a strong stance against a genocide and the occupation in Palestine,” said Blanca Missé, a member of the California Faculty Association. “We need to organize our unions to respond to the urgent call from Palestinian trade unions to stop arming Israel. (<https://progressive.international/wire/2023-10-16-an-urgent-call-from-palestinian-trade-unions-end-all-complicity-stop-arming-israel/en>) That’s the most basic principle of working-class solidarity.”

The teach-in, endorsed by seven unions and four other groups, was organized as a follow-up to the Bay Area Labor (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9k79honqIA>) for (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9k79honqIA>) Palestine rally (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9k79honqIA>) in December, when 2,000 people gathered in front of Oakland City Hall to call for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, an end to U.S. military aid to Israel, and

end of Israel's military occupation of Palestine. Since November, a network of activists from a dozen unions met weekly to organize the rally and teach-in.

"It looks like there will be multiple next steps," coming out of the gathering, said Einam Blanc, a member of [OEA for Palestine \(mailto:oeaforpalestine@gmail.com\)](mailto:oeaforpalestine@gmail.com) and co-facilitator of the workshop "[Divesting our Public Pension Funds.](https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/1YIYEQ9DdNKBUjWG_w6_cyNdCwNgQ1LEHQjhd521UBA/mobilebasic?urp=gmail_link)" ([https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/1YIYEQ9DdNKBUjWG\\_w6\\_cyNdCwNgQ1LEHQjhd521UBA/mobilebasic?urp=gmail\\_link](https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/1YIYEQ9DdNKBUjWG_w6_cyNdCwNgQ1LEHQjhd521UBA/mobilebasic?urp=gmail_link)). These include labor actions and divestment campaigns, he said.

Event organizers had received approval to host the teach-in at Westlake Middle School. But less than 24 hours before the event, the Oakland Unified School District canceled their reservation. The district claimed there were "staffing shortages," but did not cancel another event later that day at the same site.

OUSD had previously tried to shut down a [teach-in on Palestine organized by the Oakland Education Association \(https://rankandfilecaucus.wordpress.com/2024/02/12/oea-for-palestine-teach-in-further-builds-movement-in-ousd-community/\)](https://rankandfilecaucus.wordpress.com/2024/02/12/oea-for-palestine-teach-in-further-builds-movement-in-ousd-community/), and the school board.

"It's our responsibility to be talking to our co-workers and students about Palestine, and not hiding from the fear-based tactics," said Allie Grill, an OEA site rep and third-grade teacher. "We must stand in our strength as educators and ground ourselves in liberation and justice."

The event continued despite the lockout—[workshops \(https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/1YIYEQ9DdNKBUjWG\\_w6\\_cyNdCwNgQ1LEHQjhd521UBA/mobilebasic?urp=gmail\\_link\)](https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/1YIYEQ9DdNKBUjWG_w6_cyNdCwNgQ1LEHQjhd521UBA/mobilebasic?urp=gmail_link) were held outside at the school, under sunny skies. Westlake students then organized a February 28 walkout for a ceasefire and to protest the cancellation.

"This issue, the fight for Palestine, is politicizing a lot of our new, younger workers in the union," said Julia Rapkin from SEIU Local 1021. "We want to keep them involved and make sure they know that issues of international solidarity are union issues."

"Yes, it's important to pass pro-Palestine resolutions, yes the language is important," said Trish Belenson, who led a workshop on passing ceasefire resolutions. "But also how are you going to organize with your co-workers to push leadership into action? Organizing around international struggle is a way to revitalize our unions and our relationships with co-workers."

*Bahaar Tadjbakhsh works at the University of California Berkeley Labor Center and is a member of Auto Workers Local 5810. For additional resources on the issue, see "[Opening Up Palestine Conversations with Co-Workers.](#)"*

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CUHAsp37ZqaXdrcllpsEY3xvRq4BTPmHRJ2ifHnGKgl/edit>).

[“Pro-Palestine Resolution How-To,”](#)

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1i5zY5IOLkjRof\\_dVadE0eQhvl4rqfB7t/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1i5zY5IOLkjRof_dVadE0eQhvl4rqfB7t/view)).

and [“Educators 4 Palestine Workshop](#)

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