

# The Emerging Grassroots Labor Anti-Zionist Struggle



By **Gerry Scoppettuolo**

On February 16 seven U.S. International Unions announced the formation of the National Network for a Ceasefire in Palestine (<https://www.laborforceceasefire.org/>).

Most of these internationals had signed the earlier labor call issued by the United Electrical Workers (UE) on October 24. The growth and development of this movement has been steady and reflects the mood of the United States generally as well as the countless rallies, pickets, petitions, sit-ins and blockades that have swept the country in the past five months. The new labor network has the single demand for a ceasefire but, unlike UE, does not mention the urgent **call** for solidarity from Palestinian unions, which demanded far more than a ceasefire.

The Palestinian unions called on trade unions in relevant industries:

1. To refuse to build weapons destined for Israel.
2. To refuse to transport weapons to Israel.
3. To pass motions in their trade union to this effect.
4. To take action against complicit companies involved in implementing Israel's brutal and illegal siege, especially if they have contracts with your institution.
5. Pressure governments to stop all military trade with Israel, and in the case of the US, to stop funding to it.

Pushed from below, the national AFL-CIO waited until February 8 to finally issue a call for a ceasefire in a brief 50-word [press release](#) which now, however, cannot be found on its website. Before the AFL-CIO yielded and joined the ever growing chorus from member locals, it had demanded that some of the five Central Labor Councils that had endorsed the UE statement retract those endorsements.

They refused.

Seeing the futility of censuring an entire movement from below, the AFL-CIO finally issued its February 8th call for a ceasefire. This established, at least for the time being, a de facto ceiling on future demands embraced by the new labor ceasefire network and its nine internationals. Implicit in that network's February 22 [webinar](#) was a tacit endorsement of Joe Biden and the Democratic Party's November election hopes. Whether it is Netanyahu or Biden whose political future is more in peril is anyone's guess.

However, the newly launched [Labor for Palestine National Network](#) is continuing to bring together many local union efforts to fight for the Palestinian Unions' demands. New groups are joining this effort at a quickening rate, conforming to the trajectory of this movement since last October. Many international unions have rank and file caucuses that are demanding an end to military funding to Israel. This renewed grassroots movement represents a political challenge not only to Biden and the Democratic Party but to the AFL-CIO's historic international opposition to liberation movements abroad and their disdain and opposition to labor unions like the *Palestinian Confederation of Labor*.

The "official" AFL-CIO supported ceasefire labor network may yet adopt stronger demands under pressure from its rank and file. The last such upheaval in the labor bureaucracy happened in the 1980's when the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, under the leadership of Jack Sheinkman, recruited a majority of AFL-CIO internationals to oppose the leadership of the AFL-CIO's then president, Lane Kirkland, a staunch supporter of the Reagan/Kissinger fascist death squads in El Salvador and the contras in Nicaragua. The *National Labor Committee Against U.S. Intervention in El Salvador*, the NLC, sent its own investigators to El Salvador to document the many corpses of trade union leaders murdered by the National Police. The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) gave an office in its Washington D.C. headquarters to *Fenestras*, El Salvador's central labor body, in exile. This kind of solidarity was standard practice for the NLC,

*Among other campaigns, the NLC mounted particularly important ones in defense of leaders of unions representing teachers (the National Association of Salvadoran Teachers, or ANDES) and telecommunications workers (the Salvadoran Telecommunications Workers Association, or ASTTEL), unions that the AFL-CIO did not support. Given the brutality of the repression in El Salvador, at times the NLC could not defend but only try to locate the bodies of "disappeared" trade union and peasant leaders. Some of the ten trips that the*

NLC's Dave Dyson made to El Salvador in the 1980s had that purpose, as he painfully recalled: "In the early days when I was down there I used to go out to the dump, I did that twice, and tried to look for people that we knew. It is just [pause] I was never the same after I did that. I visited the morgue once too, looking for people" – *Unions and Cold War Foreign Policy in the 1980s: The National Labor Committee, the AFL-CIO, and Central America*, Andrew Battista, *Source: Diplomatic History*, Summer 2002, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Summer 2002), pp. 419-451 Published by: Oxford University Press.

The Central America solidarity movement then, clearly resembles the anti-Zionist grassroots of upsurge now in its popular power and its youthfulness. That movement was ignited by the horror of the rape and murder of four Catholic nuns by National Police of El Salvador, followed by the public assassination of Cardinal Oscar Romero while he was saying outdoor Mass in San Salvador. Both of these movements, then as well as now, complement each other and overlap. In the 1987 Iran Contra Affair, which became the biggest challenge ever to the Reagan Presidency, represented the zenith of the earlier movement, although generally unacknowledged by the bourgeois press.

The militancy of the present anti-Zionist struggle and the outcome of the current crisis cannot be predicted. However the mass character of the current intervention – especially its class component – strongly suggests that a new battle has been joined and will have a long lasting effect.