

## LABOR MOVEMENT

# Dispatches from Labor Notes: Labor Activists are Uniting for Palestine. Democrats Want to Divide Them

On the first day of the Labor Notes conference, conference attendees held a pro-Palestine rally that was repressed by the local police. As attendees were arrested outside, Chicago Mayor — and Top Chicago Cop — Brandon Johnson spoke inside.

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Thousands of activists, trade unionists, socialists, and young people new to labor and part of efforts to form unions packed the rooms for the first day of the 2024 Labor Notes conference.

This year seems to be the largest on record. As usual, the halls, lobbies, and conference rooms were lively with discussion and debate, but this year is different. It's clear that the genocide in Gaza has deeply moved the labor movement, particularly the new generation of union activists. There are hundreds of increasingly anti-imperialist young people who believe that the labor movement must **organize to stop the genocide** and who know that both the Democratic and Republican Parties are complicit in the offensive against our Gazan siblings.

Many attendees wore the Palestinian keffiyeh, showing the profound way that solidarity with Palestine has affected labor activists, youth, and the working class. In addition, an ad hoc meeting of approximately 80 attendees was held hours into the conference to discuss the encampment at **Columbia University**, which was attacked on Thursday by the university administration who called the police. Over 100 students were arrested and several others suspended. At the meeting, many participants shared their own stories of repression at their workplaces and committed to standing up together, under the principle that an injury to one is an injury to all. The Labor Notes conference is bringing together labor activists from across the country to stand up for Palestine and fight the repression in their own workplaces.

***Student Workers of Columbia Union Call for Solidarity Against Repression and in Defense of the Right to Protest. Sign Their Solidarity Pledge!***

But despite the overwhelming support of Palestine, the organizers of Labor Notes invited Chicago mayor **Brandon Johnson** to speak at the opening event. Mayor Johnson has been attacking Palestinian activists, some of whom are now, thanks to the Chicago Police Department that Johnson oversees, facing felony charges for protesting.

Mayor Johnson has also justified the recent Chicago Police shooting of a young Black man, **Dexter Reed**, and negotiated a "labor truce" for the Democratic National Convention (DNC), getting labor unions to agree not to strike while the Democrats hold their convention. Furthermore, Johnson has also refused to allow protest permits for the DNC, which further exposes the pro-Palestine movement to police repression, potentially setting the stage for a 1968-esque police repression against an anti-war movement where the Democrats give speeches on why they are the ones who will "defend democracy" as protesters are arrested outside.

Inviting Mayor Johnson helps bring more legitimacy to the Democratic Party, a party that's giving support to the genocide in Palestine and dedicated to attacking the working class, by framing Johnson — and by extension, other "progressive" Democrats — as a friends of labor. The decision to invite him was a divisive move in a moment when the labor movement should be united against repression and police violence. The fight against repression and police violence is key to unite the movement for a free Palestine and the strength of the labor movement and can only be achieved through class-independent politics.

The tension culminated when conference attendees and labor organizers — organized by Labor for Palestine — held a rally for Palestine outside the conference hotel. Workers who have been

fighting in their unions for Palestine spoke at the rally, including an organizer with **the Student Workers of Columbia**. As a response to the protest, the Rosemont police arrested several attendees. Protesters stood up for those arrested denouncing the “scabs with badges.” Cops cars were surrounded and the **Women in the Building Trades** drumline provided musical support leading the chant “which side are you on?”. Because of the combative and unrelenting spirit of the protesters, the police were forced to release all those who had been detained — they were not taken to jail. Some protesters attempted to confront Johnson during his speech and were physically prevented from entering the event.

Now, more than ever, the unity of the pro-Palestine movement and labor is essential. Working with the Democrats can only divide us since both parties are supporting the genocide and repressing our struggle, **as we are seeing at** Columbia University. It is essential to fight as one, and that is why the conference organizers must repudiate yesterday’s repression. It is also essential that the conference resolves to promote a national campaign against the repression of the Columbia students and the pro-Palestinian movement, and organize to defend the right to protest. The conference and Labor Notes should also **call unions to mobilize on May 1**, in solidarity with **the call put out** by the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions.

The protest’s example showed that young workers — radicalized through the experiences of the Black Lives Matter movement, unionizing efforts, and the fight for Palestine — will continue to use their strength until everyone is free. The Labor Notes conference has gathered a vital sector of activists in the labor movement eager to discuss issues ranging from the shopfloor, the ongoing unionization wave and the fight to end the genocide and for a free Palestine – the panels are vital spaces to discuss the way forward for the labor movement. The moment calls for a labor movement that is politically independent from the Democratic Party, class-independent and anti-imperialist.

 **Chicago** | **Democratic Party** | **Labor Movement** | **Labor Notes** | **Palestine** |

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