

Gig Economy Workers Are Organizing for Palestine

BY

TASNIMA UDDIN

In response to the war on Gaza, the 100,000-strong International Alliance of App-Based Transport Workers has called a boycott of Chevron-owned gas stations. It shows how precarious workers can use solidarity action to hit firms who profit from apartheid.

Historically, the industrial working class has led countless actions in the interest of political solidarity. Now, faced with the sheer brutality of Israeli settler colonialism, app-based workers are taking the initiative in solidarity with Palestine. The International Alliance of App-Based Transport Workers (IAATW), representing over one hundred thousand drivers across twenty countries, has pledged to boycott Chevron-owned gas and petrol stations, including Texaco and Caltex. As a global federation of twenty-six grassroots driver and app-based transport-worker unions, the group has called a mass boycott of Chevron for its complicity in genocide.

As the leading international actor extracting gas claimed by Israel in the Eastern Mediterranean, US-headquartered fossil fuel multinational Chevron has long backed Israeli apartheid. Indeed, it is directly involved in Israel's deprivation of Palestinian sovereignty over natural resources. Its extractive activities contribute to Israel's pillage of Palestinian gas reserves off the shores of the occupied Gaza Strip, constituting a war crime under international law. Moreover, Chevron's complicity extends to Israel's illegal siege of Gaza, which obstructs Palestinian access to the sea and impacts thousands of

Palestinian families dependent on fishing for their livelihoods. By bringing Israel billions in revenue, Chevron continues to strengthen Israel's war chest even as it commits grave human rights abuses.

By boycotting Chevron, drivers across twenty countries will avoid all Chevron-owned gas stations both on and off the job – and find and use alternative gas stations. Furthermore, IAATW plans to hold an international education day with Workers in Palestine to raise awareness, educate, and mobilize drivers in solidarity with Palestine. The union also intends to coordinate international strikes with the climate justice movement to disrupt Chevron's finances in various cities.

The motion was unanimously passed on February 26 by IAATW affiliates from South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Mexico, Panama, Chile, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Argentina, the United States, Canada, Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, France, Australia, and the United Kingdom. In a resolute conclusion, they declared, "IAATW stands in solidarity with the Palestinian people and their labour movement in their quest for national liberation. We demand an immediate ceasefire and an end to Israeli apartheid and military occupation, urging other labor unions to join us in this stance."

Internationalist Force

IAATW has surely done something unique in creating a global network of worker power, despite the immense difficulties of raising the collective consciousness of a largely scattered and insecure workforce. The gig economy is not built on sending jobs abroad where wages are lower, but rather on shifting the costs of doing business onto workers at home. The burden of making profits thus falls directly onto the workers themselves, often meaning poverty wages. It might seem that this would make organizing these workers domestically, let alone as an international force, far harder.

Still, in late February, IAATW's biannual conference in Sri Lanka brought together over seventy representatives from twenty-four countries to build "driver power globally." As the convention was coming to an end, Omar Parker of South Africa's Western Cape E-hailing union introduced the historic resolution reiterating IAATW's unequivocal support for Palestinian liberation. Drawing inspiration from past boycott movements, such as the 1987 oil embargo against Shell during the South African anti-apartheid struggle, the motion called for all affiliates to mobilize IAATW's over one hundred thousand members.

South African trade unions played an indispensable role in the fight against apartheid, recognizing the connection between racial oppression and capitalism. They emerged as key players in the liberation

struggle, underscoring the intertwined nature of workers' rights, human rights, and self-determination. Worker movements have historically been pivotal in national liberation struggles against colonial rule, and labor internationalism remains fundamental to the pursuit of liberation worldwide.

Leveraging Their Position

However, in IAATW's Palestine motion, welcomed by the official Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions campaign, we can see a deeper truth: these workers epitomize an organized force, rising in prominence and political power. Not bound to neutrality in the manner of many more traditional unions, it seems these workers have little interest in managing their own political expression for fear of repercussions from their employers.

In "Can the Precariat Be Organized?," Georges Van Den Abbeele explains that if labor power can check the predatory business model of platform companies, everyone benefits. He has written widely on the novel forms of mutual aid that are now possible with the rise of both the gig economy and new kinds of social interaction.

That is why it's crucial to underscore the strategic significance of IAATW's targeting of massive oil companies. It should also be set within the broader context of these workers' use of the leverage that comes from their unique position of not being official employees of Uber or other app companies. In more traditional industries, workers would most likely be stopped from launching such boycotts by their employers and bound under their contracts. Many larger industrial trade unions are, indeed, retreating from solidarity action or adopting apolitical stances on Palestine. But the future will only show the inherent weakness of any so-called nonideological union and the strength of the collective action emerging from the precariat's shared vulnerability and disenfranchisement.

The boycott pledged by workers for such firms as Uber, Deliveroo, Just Eat, Free Now, Glovo, Lyft, Grab, DoorDash, Grubhub, Amazon, Ola, Gojek, Didi, Bolt, and Careem symbolizes more than just a collective response to crisis. It embodies the transformative potential of a new and evolving form of resistance, organizing for a free Palestine.

CONTRIBUTORS

Tasnima Uddin is an international labor organizer and cofounder of the Bengali socialist organization Nijjor Manush.

FILED UNDER

War and Imperialism / Unions

Gig Economy / Precarity / boycotts / unions / Gaza