

LABOR MOVEMENT

Labor Notes Must Call on Unions to Mobilize for Palestine on May Day

As the genocide in Gaza rages on, the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions has called on workers around the world to mobilize against the genocide on May 1. Labor Notes, one of the leading organizers of the U.S. labor movement, must heed this call and use their influence in the labor movement to call on unions to join the mobilization

Julia Wallace and Emma Lee | April 18, 2024



This International Workers' Day comes with a historic responsibility for the U.S. labor movement. We are in the midst of a genocide with over 32,000 Palestinians killed in Gaza and over a million

facing famine. The labor movement and broader working class must do everything in our power to stop it. As a leading organizing network for the labor movement in the United States, we call on Labor Notes to mobilize unions and workers to shut it down for Palestine on May Day.

From April 19-21, over 4,000 workers and union organizers will gather at the Labor Notes conference in Chicago — the city where May Day was born as a commemoration of the bloody fight against the police for an 8-hour work day in Haymarket Square in 1886. The brave struggle of the workers in Haymarket Square spread internationally and is recognized across the world. This is a powerful example of the fact that workers and oppressed people everywhere share the same fight. Then, as now, our struggle as workers is inextricably tied to the fight against capitalism and imperialism. This year, we must remember that internationalism and place the liberation of Palestine at the center of our demands.

Last month, the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU-Gaza) **made an urgent call** for workers around the world — particularly the United States, whose government is bankrolling the ongoing genocide by the state of Israel — to stand in solidarity with the Palestine on May Day:

Instead of celebrating with you on May 1st, International Workers Day, we are busy shrouding dozens of people who are being killed around the clock in the middle of a genocidal war against our people – in every sense of that word. ... In the midst of pain and blood, in the displacement camps, amidst the rubble, and the ruins of our homes, workshops, factories, stores, and institutions destroyed by the “Israeli” occupation, using U.S.-made weapons, in the name of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU), we call on you for solidarity.

The connection between workers in America and Palestine is clear. Our tax dollars fund Israeli weapons; our union dues fund Israeli bonds. This backing of the Israeli war machine by the state and union bureaucracy is done without our consent.

The settler-colonial state of Israel is part and parcel of the same system of racist state violence that brutalizes Black and brown people in the United States. As **Labor For Palestine** writes, drawing connections between Black Lives Matter and the current fight against the genocide: “With Israel’s knee on their neck, Palestinians can’t breathe.”

The time is overdue for the labor movement in the United States to play a role proportionate to its potential.

Our labor is used to manufacture and ship weapons for Israel — more than two million U.S. workers are **employed** by the weapons industry, which produces over 80 percent of all Israel’s arms imports — which gives us the power to disrupt the genocide.

Since October, we have seen incredibly important rank-and-file organizing for Palestine within U.S. labor unions, challenging historic ties between union bureaucracies and Zionism, passing

ceasefire resolutions, and forcing the union leaderships to make statements in support of a ceasefire.

But the PGFTU's appeal also exposes the "shocking silence and neglect by the international labor movement," whose ceasefire resolutions have not translated into tangible actions that could materially weaken Israel's capacity to carry out its massacre. We need to go beyond the horizon of resolutions that our union leaders have limited us to; we need to heed the calls of Palestinian labor unions who are calling on workers to stop arms shipments to Israel, and shut it all down.

Many unions have begun to fight back against the genocide. Dock workers in **South Africa, India, Greece, Turkey, Italy, Belgium**, and the **ILWU** on the West Coast of the United States have refused to handle Israeli cargo. Workers in **Colombia, Canada, Australia, Japan** have also joined Palestine protestors to take action at their workplaces. Workers in places like **Google, Starbucks**, and universities have put their jobs at risk to challenge their workplaces' support for Israel.

These actions highlight the strategic position of the working class — the factories, ships, schools, hospitals, offices, and stores can't run without us. The U.S. labor movement must follow the lead of these brave workers and refuse "business as usual" while our class siblings in Palestine are being slaughtered, occupied, segregated, terminated, and face **intolerable conditions at work** and in their lives.

Labor Notes should take a strong internationalist stance by calling on unions to demand an end to the genocide and U.S. military aid, as well as an end to the occupation, the apartheid regime, and to **intolerable working conditions** that devastate, brutalize, and dehumanize our working-class and oppressed Palestinians siblings.

The labor movement also has a key role to play in denouncing the **repression** faced by workers and students who are being attacked for their participation in the pro-Palestine movement. Most recently in the United States, we've seen students suspended and arrested at multiple universities, such as **Columbia University**, Vanderbilt University, and Pomona College. We've also seen **two dozen Google employees fired and nine arrested** after a 10-hour sit-in to denounce Project Nimbus, Google's cloud computing project for the Israeli government and military.

Labor for Palestine National Network is organizing a rally at Labor Notes to "amplify and uplift the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions-Gaza's urgent appeal to U.S. labor for solidarity, to go beyond words and to escalate pressure to stop the genocide in Gaza." The rally will be held on Friday, April 19 at 6:30pm outside the main entrance of the Hyatt Regency O'Hare. All conference attendees and members of the Chicago community are invited to attend.

The PGFTU calls on the U.S. labor movement "to be our voice and advocate inside and outside America. What our people are experiencing and what workers and unions in particular, are exposed to is the most horrific catastrophe known to humanity in recent decades. We ask that

you convey our message and give voice to the suffering of hungry, starving workers and their families—not just to the American people, not just to your unions, but to the entire world.”

The Labor Notes conference should be a space to uplift this call and push for unions to go from statements to action. We urge Labor Notes to call on unions, workers, activists, and the youth to organize and mobilize on May Day for Palestine with “**No Business As Usual: May Day for Palestine!**”

Organizations can endorse this mobilization [here](#).

This May Day, and every day, we must stand against the genocidal attacks on Palestine and the repression of the student and workers’ movement that is fighting for Palestine.

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Julia Wallace

Julia is a contributor for Left Voice and has been a revolutionary socialist for over ten years. She served on the South Central Neighborhood Council in Los Angeles and is a member of SEIU Local 721. Julia organizes against police brutality and in defense of LGBTQ, women, and immigrants' rights. When she's not actively fighting the patriarchy, white supremacy and/or capitalism, she enjoys many things: she loves Thundercat, plays ultimate frisbee and is a founder of the team, "Black Lives Hammer."



Emma Lee

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