



NEWS

# May Day Rallies Focus on Palestinian Solidarity in San Francisco, Oakland

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An individual who goes by Ghassan, left, leads demonstrators on Mission Street at the May Day rally during International Worker's Day on Wednesday, May 1, 2024. (Gina Castro/KQED)

*Updated 7:45 p.m. Wednesday*

Numerous rallies and marches took place Wednesday for both International Workers Day and in solidarity with ongoing pro-Palestinian protests around the Bay Area.

The day of action comes on the heels of dozens of protests around the Bay Area, some of which have led to highway and bridge closures, calling on the U.S. to end military aid to Israel.

The steady drumbeat of demonstrations comes as Israel's war in Gaza has extended into its seventh month. Israel's assault on Gaza, in response to Hamas' Oct. 7 attack that killed some 1,200 Israelis and claimed 240 hostages, according to Israeli officials, has caused widespread devastation. At least 34,500 Palestinians, most of them women and children, have since been killed, according to Gaza health officials. Famine is now imminent in Gaza, with 1.1 million people expected to face "catastrophic conditions" by the end of May, **according to international experts.**





Jim Martinez, also known as the protest cheerleader, shouts at the May Day rally during International Worker's Day in the Mission on Wednesday, May 1, 2024. (Gina Castro/KQED)

“We’re still fighting for those basic fundamentals for workers all around the globe,” said Norma Gallegos, an auto mechanic worker who was at a protest on Wednesday that kicked off at **10 a.m. at the 24th Street BART station**. “We are definitely for freeing Palestine and stopping U.S. funding and Israeli funding going toward the genocide of Palestinians. We need to go beyond a cease-fire.”

In San Francisco, Gallegos was part of about 450 people who joined a rally and march for economic justice for laborers in the U.S. and the Middle East. Groups such as Dolores Street Community Services, Jobs with Justice SF, San Francisco Living Wage Coalition and others will lead the march and rally, which is expected to wrap up by 2 p.m.

Chants of “si se puede” and “free, free Palestine” took over the BART plaza before the group took off to City Hall.

Over at the Embarcadero, a separate pro-Palestinian protest also formed at **Harry Bridges Plaza at 12:30 p.m.**

“I don’t think it is in our interest — while there is unemployment, a high cost of living and other difficulties that working people have — to have our taxes sent towards military equipment that will harm other people around the world,” said Ricardo Ortiz, who was at the protest downtown.

At 3 p.m., about 1,000 hotel workers with Unite Here Local 2 and janitors with SEIU Local 87 are expected to march through downtown San Francisco, beginning at 415 California St. and ending at Union Square.

“We demand tax money be used to house the homeless, guarantee free universal healthcare, quality education, and good paying jobs for all,” the groups’ list of demands reads. “Stop privatization, outsourcing & union busting!”





The May Day rally during International Worker's Day in the Mission in San Francisco on May 1, 2024. (Gina Castro/KQED)

Many of the people planning to join the protest clean offices for Google, Meta and other major companies, as well as hotel chains like Hilton, Marriott and Hyatt. They are calling for raises, health care and more balanced workloads in their upcoming



contract negotiations with their employers.



➔ SFSU Pro-Palestinian Encampment Established as Students Rally for Divestment

A planned 4 p.m. rally and march calling for an end to U.S. aid in Israel from West Oakland BART to the Port of Oakland was canceled by organizers Wednesday afternoon.

Port of Oakland officials say the seaport is closed until Thursday — and activists are calling the closure a victory.

“I think it’s a testimony to the power of our movement that the port employers and big businesses who do business at the port would rather lose millions of dollars in profit than face our community mobilized,” said Wassim Hage, an organizer for the Arab Resource and Organizing Center.

A port spokesperson said the closure was already scheduled due to a monthly union meeting. A union official said in an email that the meeting normally only stops work for a single shift. A port spokesperson would not confirm that the daylong closure was due to the planned protest.

Despite the canceled port protest, hundreds of people still marched through downtown Oakland early Wednesday evening to commemorate the day and continue calls for an end to U.S. aid to Israel. The short but lively demonstration — which included drummers and dancers — made its way to the steps of Oakland City Hall, where organizers demanded the government cease funding foreign wars and invest more in its own working class.

Sim Sipin, who participated in the downtown Oakland march, said demonstrators hoped to bring attention to what she called the government’s “mismatched priorities” that have resulted in gross overspending on police and military operations, even as “people are having a harder time just living, just making it day to day.”

“We know the money that is funding the war in Gaza, the money that is funding the Israeli military, does not come out of nowhere,” she said. “That money is really from the hard-earned labor of U.S. taxpayers, of workers all around the world.”

In addition to the protests on roadways, a growing list of Bay Area college campuses has joined pro-Palestinian movements to call on universities to divest from Israeli weapon manufacturers and other ties.

Student and faculty protests have formed at UC Berkeley, Stanford University, San Francisco State, University of San Francisco, Sonoma State and Humboldt State, joining protests at other institutions like Columbia University and the



University of Southern California.

*KQED's Juan Carlos Lara contributed reporting to this story.*

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