


[Read the E-CHIEF \(/editions/\)](#)

[f \(https://www.facebook.com/TheChiefLeader\)](https://www.facebook.com/TheChiefLeader) 

<https://twitter.com/thechiefleader> [@ \(https://instagram.com/thechiefnyc\)](https://instagram.com/thechiefnyc) 

[\(/browse.rss\)](#)

The Chief

(/)

A VOICE FOR WORKERS

MAIN MENU



[Log in \(/login.html\)](#)

[Subscribe \(/subscribe/\)](#)

Search



A few of our stories and columns are now in front of the paywall. We at The Chief-Leader remain committed to independent reporting on labor and civil service. It's been our mission since 1897. You can have a hand in ensuring that our reporting remains relevant in the decades to come. Consider supporting The Chief, which you can do for as little as \$3.20 a month ([/subscribe/](#)).

Solidarity strikes can end the genocide in Gaza



(<https://zeta.creativecirclecdn.com/chief/original/20240520-133321-a95-phpIWBC1.jpg>)

Protestors gathered in front of the Texas State Capitol in Austin, Texas, on Sunday, the 76th Nakba Day, to protest what they called the American-funded genocide of Palestinians in Gaza.

STEPHANIE TACY/SIPA USA VIA AP IMAGES

Posted Monday, May 20, 2024 1:25 pm

BY ROBERT OVETZ

My father thought God had abandoned us Jews during World War II. He survived the Holocaust as a teenager in a forced labor camp in Romania.

Today, the Palestinians may suspect they too have been abandoned after seven months of Israel's genocidal slaughter of more than 35,000 people and the complete destruction of Gaza.

Although nation states, the U.N., International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice have failed to stop Israel, the Palestinians are not alone. Workers in the U.S. are beginning to escalate their tactics to pressure our unions to do more than issue ceasefire resolutions. Some of our union leadership, such as the president of the United Auto Workers, Shaun Fain (<https://theintercept.com/2024/01/24/uaw-biden-endorsement-gaza/>), are undermining these calls by endorsing President Joe Biden for re-election while he supplies Israel with the bombs to help carry out the slaughter.

In the past few months, the Palestinians have found a new ally in the U.S. University students are organizing a global uprising in solidarity with the people of Gaza. The students are demanding that their universities divest from corporations doing business with Israel and that the U.S. stop its funding of Israel, currently about \$3 billion per year (<https://www.cfr.org/article/us-aid-israel-four-charts>).

Many of the protests and encampments on 174 campuses in 45 states and 35 countries (<https://www.palestineiseverywhere.com/>) have been met with brutal police violence including at my alma mater, The University of Texas at Austin.

Israel's widespread killing of Palestinians is hardly new. Our international system requires nation states to take action to stop genocide and other atrocities. But rather than stop Israel, Western powers have encouraged, funded and even armed the slaughter.

I know about genocide. My aunts and uncles participated in the first Nakba (<https://www.un.org/unispal/about-the-nakba/>), or “catastrophe,” soon after emigrating from the labor camp in Romania. They stole the house of a Palestinian family at gunpoint and gave it to my grandparents.

Similar atrocities continue taking place today as an entire society inflicts a trauma-induced revenge against the Palestinians. The descendants of the Holocaust are carrying out their own mass killings of the Palestinians.

Despite the repression of dissent, Israel and its allies cannot use Hamas’ violent slaughter of 1,100 Israelis and the taking 240 hostages to justify the genocide.

For the first time in my life, my daughter and the thousands of others engaged in the campus uprisings are showing us a way to end Israel’s occupation. They are learning the successes and limits of the anti-apartheid movement in the 1970s and 1980s that forced some governments, universities and corporations to divest from South Africa. Beginning in 1963, cultural boycotts, embargoes and sanctions (<https://southafrica.un.org/en/about/about-the-un>) on arms and oil and sanctions by the U.N. and two dozen countries cut off all business with South Africa.

The most effective tactics that aided the people’s armed struggle were strikes by dockworkers, who refused to load goods and weapons bound for South Africa. These strikes disrupted the South African economy and forced the ruling white minority to give up power, ending apartheid.

Last October, the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (<https://tempestmag.org/2023/11/palestinian-general-federation-of-trade-unions-statement/>) called on workers in the U.S. to escalate efforts to stop the genocide. So far, just 10 large U.S. unions, the AFL-CIO and a few state labor federations have called for a ceasefire (<https://www.laborforcecefire.org/>).

To stop the atrocities, rank and file union members are pushing their leadership to do more than call for a ceasefire. Forcing the Biden administration to stop funding Israel will require a strategy that disrupts critical choke points (<https://thechiefleader.com/stories/workers-have-disruptive-power-lets-use-it,49430>) in the U.S. economy, a topic I have written about on these pages.

Protests are beginning to escalate. Last week hundreds of current and former Google employees attempted to block entry to an annual google conference (<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/article/2024/may/14/palestine-protest-google-conference>). Last month, about 50 employees who protested a project for Israel were fired by the company (<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/apr/27/google-project-nimbus-israel>).

Over the past few months, marches at the Port of Oakland have repeatedly disrupted shipping to Israel for several hours or an entire day. But this is far from a solidarity strike by the powerful International Longshore and Warehouse Union, which used to support the Palestinian struggle for liberation. The ILWU famously refused to unload South African cargo (<https://www.ilwu.org/local-10-delegation-marks-50th-anniversary-of-the-durban-strikes/>) in the Port of San Francisco in 1962, 1977 and 1984. Unfortunately, the ILWU’s president, an ally of Israel, will not call for a ceasefire or solidarity strike (<https://www.counterpunch.org/2024/02/21/dock-workers-block-military-cargo-to-israel-against-the-genocidal-war-on-palestinians-in-gaza/>) despite calls to do so by several locals.

Protests play an important role but they are not enough. We need to organize to disrupt production at critical choke points, not merely ask the companies to stop.

On May Day, graduate students at UC Santa Cruz went on a wildcat strike (<https://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2024/05/01/18865630.php>) in solidarity with the workers of Gaza. At the May 13th rally I attended, a researcher described how a strike was needed to disrupt hundreds of millions of dollars of defense contracts, many of which serve Israel.

Their wildcat strike and the recent brutal repression of the grad students in the Gaza solidarity encampment at UCLA and UC San Diego sparked their union, UAW 4811, to vote last week to carry out an unfair labor practice strike (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2024/05/15/university-california-uaw-union-strike/>) across the entire 10-campus University of California system.

Solidarity strikes at other critical choke points have already been taking place around the world. Port workers in Spain, Belgium (<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20231107-barcelona-dock-workers-refuse-to-deal-with-weapons-ships-heading-to-israel/>), Australia, Canada and the U.K. have refused to handle cargo and port workers in

