



# Mondoweiss

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ACTIVISM

## We need to strike for Palestine: why UAW 4811 matters

In the years to come, we will need the strike as a tool for collective action to confront the challenges that face us. But right now, Palestine needs us, and that means we need to support reformers in the upcoming UAW 4811 Triennial Elections.

BY [MARY JIRMANUS SABA](#) - APRIL 30, 2024 - 0



MEMBERS OF UAW LABOR FOR PALESTINE MARCHING IN BROOKLYN, DECEMBER 9, 2023. (PHOTO: UAW LABOR FOR PALESTINE)

Workers across the U.S. labor movement, including the United Auto Workers (UAW), are mobilizing for Palestine. From the strong resolutions passed at Ford UAW Local 551 (representing workers at Ford’s Chicago Assembly Plant), to UAW 4811 at UC Berkeley’s resolution to commit union resources to make Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) a bargaining demand, to the historic vote from the UAW International Executive Board (IEB) last November to investigate the union’s ties to Israel’s apartheid regime, workers in the U.S. are advancing the demands of their Palestinian allies. These changes have been led by rank-and-file efforts—including an [ongoing pressure campaign](#) on the UAW International Election Board—which led the UAW to become the largest union to call for a ceasefire.

These are all important developments. However, trade unionists in the United States have not yet been able to adequately respond to the call from [Palestinian trade unions](#) to stop all weapons to Israel. This is in sharp contrast to [Belgium](#), [India](#), [Spain](#), [Ireland](#), and

[even England](#), where trade unions have said they will not ship weapons to aid the genocide.

It's imminently needed that U.S. unions — including the UAW, which represent [workers manufacturing weapons](#) — join global efforts to intervene in the ongoing genocide happening in Gaza. If U.S. workers were to join this transnational movement, they would drastically transform the material conditions on the ground: Without weapons from the United States, [Israel cannot continue its policy](#) of occupation and ethnic cleansing.

Accomplishing this will require us to transform our unions into vehicles for building worker power, independent from business interests and the war-profiteering Democratic National Committee (DNC). We will need to build a labor movement led by, and [prioritizing the needs](#) of, its most marginalized members — a labor movement that can strike for Palestine.

This is the vision of our slate “Reform UC-UAW,” composed of Raj Chaklashiya (President), Dylan Kupsh (Academic Student Employee Chair), Yağmur Ali Coşkun (Recording Secretary) and myself, Mary Jirmanus Saba (Financial Secretary). We are running for statewide Executive Board of the amalgamated University of California UAW Local 4811. It is a vision we share with reform slates running at each campus: [Reform UAW-UCB](#), [UCLA Rank and File](#), [UCSB4COLA](#) and [UCD Organize to Win](#).

Our slate believes that the UAW can take a transformative role in slowing the U.S. war machine and supporting the struggle for a free Palestine. Many of the weapons [U.S. companies sell to Israel](#) are made in union shops, [including the UAW](#). But an increasing number of workers do not want the product of their labor to be used for genocide.

A coalition of UAW workers across sectors called [UAW Labor for Palestine](#) has been calling on the UAW International Executive Board, regions and locals to immediately divest from Israel. Among our demands is to organize and support workers to stop sending Israel weapons using the [“moral injury” framework](#), to divest university funding sources

and to transition to an economy which centers human needs, public health, education and transport and a sustainable planet.

As academic workers, we are deeply entrenched in the war machine: the UC is heavily subsidized by the military industry. In 2022 alone, it received [\\$295 million dollars](#) from the Department of Defence for research. However, our colleagues in [Astronomy and Astrophysics](#) at UC Santa Cruz — who pledged to stop accepting funding from the Department of Defence — have already demonstrated that it is possible to refuse complicity in militarism.

There is legal precedent and a [path forward](#) for [divestment from war](#) across the weapons supply chain. These can only grow stronger if the UAW IEB supports them. Unfortunately, the IEB has been [unwilling](#) to more boldly support these demands, even as rank-and-file voices become more difficult to ignore.

So what does this have to do with 4811 elections?

The current “Union MADE” ([formerly Organizing for Student Worker Power OSWP](#)) leadership of our local has styled itself as pro-Palestine, but they have undercut rank-and-file efforts to fight for BDS. After [UCLA](#), UCB, UCI, and [UCSB](#) passed BDS resolutions, Union MADE leadership created a statewide membership [vote reiterating their commitment to call for a ceasefire](#). However, this referendum mentioned BDS only in a footnote and [failed to commit](#) to any practical steps to push UC to divest. The UAW Region 6 Director Mike Miller used the same tactic at the International level, introducing [a ceasefire resolution](#) at the IEB instead of the detailed BDS resolutions our Region 6 locals passed at many campuses.

Even more egregiously, [Region 6 endorsed](#) pro-war candidate [Katie Porter](#) for the empty California US Senate Seat, without a membership vote. All of these actions reflect Region 6’s loyalty to [business unionism](#), which has [dismantled social justice](#) labor organizing and undermined labor’s independence.

But things can be different.

Since October the US has seen unprecedented popular protests around Palestine. But imagine if workers across the weapons supply chain — from academic researchers, to production, to transport — could actually strike, together, over Palestine. The power to collectively withhold labor is the game changer we need to interrupt the genocide, and to take back the labor movement for social justice and true worker power. To do this, as we've [learned in the past months](#) through our work with UAW Labor for Palestine, we will need a courageous IEB, emboldened by and accountable to an activated and rank-and-file.

UAW4811 is the largest academic worker union, in the country's largest public education system, filled with engaged workers poised to create exactly the kind of transformative pressure needed. This ambitious vision for our union will not happen as long as our "Union MADE" leadership, and our local, remains aligned with the Democratic Party and its corporate-class agenda.

In the years to come, we will need the strike as a tool for collective action to confront fascism, unbridled pandemics and climate change. We will need unions as our vehicles to liberate and transform our planet. But right now, Palestine needs us, and that means that we need to take the concrete step of supporting reformers across UAW 4811 in the Triennial Elections taking place from May 2 to May 3. We need to take back our union — for the common liberation of Palestine and our own members.

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