

SWC-UAW passes resolution supporting BDS, commits to strike ‘should circumstances justify’

The resolutions passed with overwhelming support from Student Workers of Columbia-United Auto Workers members, who cast their votes while electing leaders for the upcoming year.



By [Erick Berlanga](#) / Staff Photographer

In its BDS resolution, SWC called for its parent union—the United Auto Workers—and Columbia to divest from companies with ties to Israel.

BY [SURINA VENKAT](#) • JULY 1, 2024 AT 11:40 PM

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Members of Student Workers of Columbia-United Auto Workers, a union representing over 3,000 undergraduate and graduate student workers,

from Columbia's campus, the organization announced [this](#) on June 27.

In its resolutions, SWC-UAW endorsed BDS, a Palestinian-led movement calling for organizations to withdraw economic and political support from Israel and any companies with ties to Israel. Demands in the resolution included Columbia's divestment from weapons manufacturers and other firms that violate BDS and the permanent removal of NYPD officers from campus. SWC-UAW also called on its parent organization, the United Auto Workers, an organization representing over 65,000 academic workers and almost 400,000 total members across the United States, to divest from Israeli bonds.

The organization wrote in the resolutions that for its upcoming 2025 contract negotiations with the University, it would organize for BDS as a demand, as well as aim to secure a robust "Cops off Campus" contract article addressing campus access for NYPD officers and other governmental agency representatives.

"Should circumstances justify, SWC commits to organizing and calling for a strike, through our democratic Strike Authorization Vote process, as our most powerful tactic to win these demands and to ensure that Columbia University complies with its moral and legal obligation to end its complicity in the genocide, ethnic cleansing, and colonization of the Palestinian people," the BDS [resolution](#) reads.

A University spokesperson declined to comment on the SWC-UAW resolutions.

University President Minouche Shafik authorized the presence of NYPD officers on campus multiple times during her presidency, including during the NYPD [sweep](#) of the [first "Gaza Solidarity Encampment"](#) on April 18 and the NYPD [sweep](#) of the [second "Gaza Solidarity Encampment"](#) and [occupied Hamilton Hall](#) on April 30. In a [letter](#) sent on April 30 to the NYPD, in which Shafik authorized the second police sweep, she [requested](#) that NYPD officers remain on campus [until May 17](#).

Shafik also [announced](#) in an April 29 email to the Columbia community that the University "will not divest from Israel," ending multiple days of negotiations between members of the administration and student representatives from the second "Gaza Solidarity Encampment."

SWC-UAW's BDS resolution not only puts the union at odds with the University, but also with leadership within the UAW itself. While UAW President Shawn Fain has

the BDS movement in 2015, the SWC passed a resolution passed by members of UAW Local 2865—a union of over 13,000 academic workers in the University of California system—calling for the UAW’s International Executive Board to divest from Israel.

SWC-UAW went on strike [twice](#) in 2021 to demand contracts that offered better protections and compensation for student workers of the University.

Demands from the first strike, which took place in March 2021, included access to grievance and arbitration for cases of discrimination and harassment, which would allow union workers to access third-party arbitration in appeals processes with the University. Due to failed federal mediation between SWC-UAW and the University, the first strike [ended](#) with a contract that did not address those concerns.

The second strike began in November 2021 and continued for ten weeks, disrupting classes and club activities until it concluded in January 2022. Partially in response to the first strike’s failure, the November 2021 strike ended with Columbia and SWC-UAW reaching a [tentative agreement](#) that allowed student workers to access more routes to legal recourse and third-party arbitration, as well as earn higher wages.

In their agreement, the University and SWC-UAW agreed to a no-strike clause, which prevents the SWC from legally striking before the contract expires in July 2025.

SWC-UAW has been active in supporting pro-Palestinian demonstrations since October 2023 and released its [own statement of solidarity](#) with Palestinians on Oct. 19, 2023.

“As a community of instructors, researchers and students at Columbia University, we stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people,” the [statement](#) reads. “We affirm their right to self-determination and freedom from apartheid.”

SWC-UAW voted to join Columbia University Apartheid Divest on Nov. 14, 2023. Several members of SWC-UAW participated on the same day in a [protest](#) in response to the University’s [suspension](#) of the Columbia chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine and Jewish Voice for Peace.

While voting for the BDS and “Cops off Campus” resolutions, SWC-UAW also held elections. The union’s new executive board will lead negotiations with the University for their 2025 contract.

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