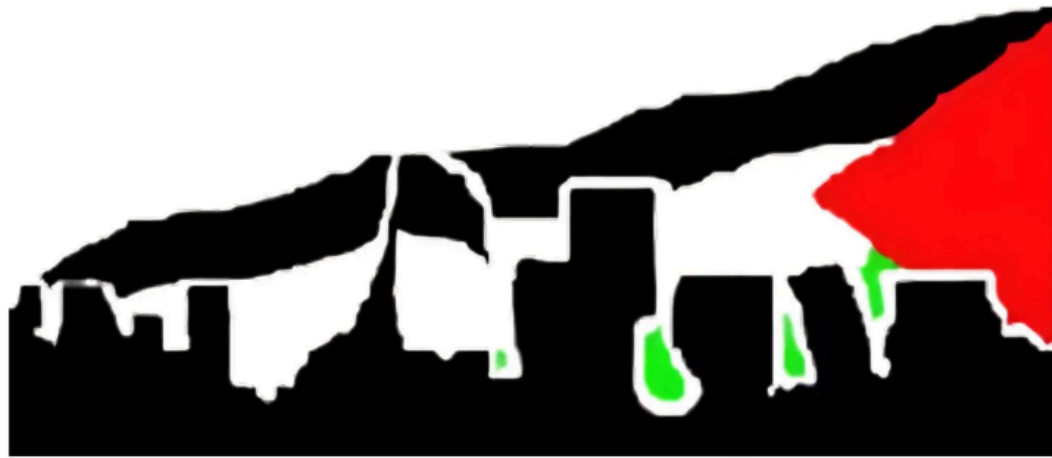

United States: Workers March for Palestine in the Bay Area

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LABOR
FOR
PALESTINE



By Tara

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This last May Day in the Bay Area, actions and observances brought labor issues together with the antiwar movement. Bay Area Labor for Palestine, a coalition of union members, union staff, and workers organizing in solidarity with Palestine, participated in a morning march in San Francisco and an afternoon march across the bay in Oakland. Hundreds of workers joined in from many different sectors.

According to one of the leaders of the coalition, Oakland teacher M., Bay Area Labor for Palestine has brought together workers mainly from education, logistics, and health care—although with participation from workers from across the public and private sectors. She said, “May 1st was the culmination of our organizing and asking members to turn towards their own workplaces and organize their coworkers to take a stand in solidarity with Palestine. The two events we endorsed, the S.F. rally and the Oakland one, were well attended for weekday actions.”

Indeed, the May Day actions were the fruit of significant organizing work by Bay Area Labor for Palestine. According to M., “In December, we organized a rally and march in Oakland demanding a ceasefire now, an end to U.S. aid to Israel, and an end to the occupation. Over 2000 people attended, and many of the Bay Area’s largest unions endorsed, including SEIU 1021, OEA, UESF, UNITE HERE Local 2, AFSCME 3299, SEIU-USWW, UAW 2865 Berkeley, UAW 5810 Berkeley, and ILWU Local 10.”

That momentum was continued into February, when M. said that Labor for Palestine “hosted a mass organizing meeting to plan how to grow our movement and take action together.” However, despite having over 500 RSVPs, the Oakland School District attempted to sabotage the meeting by locking everyone out of the previously reserved space. Nonetheless, according to M., the coalition continued outside in the parking lot and successfully “held 16 workshops, including ‘BDS Workshop for Union Activists on Divesting our Public Pension Funds,’ ‘Leveraging Labor’s Electoral Power,’ and ‘Retaliation Defense: Fighting for Palestine in a Hostile Workplace.’ As the concluding act of the mass organizing meeting, attendees signed pledges to withhold labor on May Day in solidarity with Palestine.”

One education worker who participated on the workers’ day was Jose Monterojo, a teacher from San Francisco, who was part of a group of teachers who took labor action and called in sick for Palestine. He said that “our coworkers responded with support and sympathy. Those who didn’t sickout or walkout expressed their support by putting up the posters explaining the situation in Gaza and our solidarity with the Palestinian trade unions. By framing our action as an antiwar action and opposed to our own government’s role, we built political relationships with folks who were on the fence regarding their view on the war and solidarity movement with Palestine. Managers, on the other hand, responded by tearing down the posters in our classrooms, to which our committee is preparing a response.”

These site committees have been key for workers in the education sector when building support for Palestine at work. Monterojo thinks that building these committees is critical for doing this work in the education sector. He said that “the first step is to build a core group of trusted co organizers with a common vision. In our case, we united around an uncompromising opposition to the war and American complicity with genocide. From there, we reached out to our coworkers, some with experience in union and social movements and others for whom this is their first organizing experience. Our site committee is a space in which we can learn about the struggle and how to become effective organizers. For our May 1st sickout, solidarity committee members took up various roles, including outreach, messaging to our staff, banner making, etc., in one inspiring action.”

Another different group of workers at the May 1 action were tech workers, who marched as a bloc with their own banner. One of the tech workers, Herman, explained that tech workers needed to mobilize for Palestine because “tech workers play a highly productive role in both the U.S. and Israeli economy. Our labor produces enormous profits for tech companies that can then be used to invest into the Israeli tech sector; just last month Nvidia used its excess profits to invest hundreds of millions into Israel through the acquisition of Run:AI.”

Another issue for Herman was that U.S. tech workers’ labor is used to build Israel’s war machine. One example he gave was the Nimbus contract between Google, Amazon, and the Israeli government, which he said furthers the surveillance of Palestinians and facilitates the construction of Israeli settlements through the use of Google Cloud and Amazon Web Services. Herman said that “as workers we need to exercise our right to free speech to protest these investments and contracts with Israel and also create a mass movement to pressure the companies that we work for to stop their profiteering and advancement of the genocide and displacement of Palestinians.”

Herman also explained that this issue has become particularly urgent for tech workers after Google workers were fired after some of them had participated in a pro-Palestine action. As he put it, “The workers at Google were fired for speaking out on the job. Google has tried to frame this as a disruption and occupation of workspaces that was making other workers feel threatened. People can look online for videos of the sit in and see for themselves that it was clearly a non-violent demonstration that occupied two office rooms in different buildings. Additionally, at this point, more workers who were not part of the sit in have been fired than those who have. Even on Google’s own grounds, these firings are not about who was part of the action but actually were an attack on any worker who was against their profiteering on genocide.

“This is why it’s important for us to participate in the May Day Labor for Palestine March. Workers are only able to exercise their power fully when they organize together on a mass scale, and that is what it will take for us to defend these workers and build

future demonstrations demanding that the Nimbus contract be cancelled and for all the fired workers to be reinstated”

Another tech worker at the May 1 rally explained the current state of the defense campaign for these fired workers: “Right now the fired Google workers are filing an NLRB case against Google for their firings, more broadly though we have a petition that can be found online ([here](#)) that we are asking all workers to sign and share with their unions, friends, and coworkers to help organize a broad defense campaign in support of the fired workers. We want to use this as a time to reach out to workers who previously have not been involved in these mobilizations and ask them to join us in standing up for civil liberties in the work place”

Workers at the rally were also optimistic about next steps for Bay Area Labor for Palestine and the antiwar movement in general. “Workers can play a significant role in challenging American imperialist policy if we organize a national antiwar movement that includes labor struggles in which workers mobilize our economic and social power,” the teacher Jose Monterojo said, “From here, we need to make summer organizing plans so that our committee remains active. One priority is to unite Bay Area Labor for Palestine with the student antiwar movement in order to fight state repression and end U.S. aid to Israel.”

Others pointed out the limitations of the current state of the movement and advocated for growing and deepening it. M. pointed out that while the current engagement of unions in the Palestine movement is historic, much work remains to deepen it and bring this issue to our coworkers. As she put it, “My union, Oakland Educators Association, had a great showing of about 150 at the rally in Oakland and about triple that of folks who took some kind of work action. However great this is, it is still only about 10% of our union.”

To that end, the tech worker Herman said that “to grow this movement, workers across the industry will need to begin organizing their workplaces and also building the Palestine liberation movement in conjunction with the broader layers of the militant working class in the U.S. The way I see it, this is the only road open to workers who want to see us leverage our power in the industry to demand an end to the genocide.”
