

TOP STORY AUG 20

# Trade Unionists Vow to Push Arms Embargo, Gaza Ceasefire—With or Without Leadership's Support



Protesters at Sunday's Cadman Plaza Park rally in Brooklyn insist the billions being spent on U.S. bombs and missiles for Israel is money not being spent here at home. Photos/Joe Maniscalco

By Joe Maniscalco

On Sunday, trade unionists and other working class people rallying at Cadman Plaza Park in Brooklyn to demand an immediate embargo on U.S. arms to Israel and Gaza ceasefire talked how it doesn't really matter what national labor union leaders do or don't do to confront the genocide—rank and file members appalled by the inhuman carnage are gonna keep pushing until it's stopped.

“We have a union president who decided to release a statement—unilaterally, without membership input—in sympathy with Israel on October 13—after 6,000 bombs had already been dropped on Gaza,” SAG-AFTRA member Gabriel Kornbluh told Work-Bites on Sunday. “We as entertainers, actors, and performers—we're storytellers—and we thought it was time to tell the story of Palestinian humanity. And whether our union was going to allow us to do that or not—was irrelevant. We as rank and file members took it upon ourselves to stand up for Palestinian humanity.”

Israeli military forces backed by billions of dollars in U.S. military aid have killed more than 40,000 Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip since Hamas' attack last October—among them 16,456 children and over 11,000 women, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

And that's widely considered to be a dramatic undercount that doesn't account for all the dead left buried under the rubble, or the scores of others that are undoubtedly in the process of dying from disease, hunger, and other associated calamities.

“I think every worker that's in a union in America has problems with their union leadership,” Queens Starbucks worker James Carr told Work-Bites. “It's part of the structural issues of our country. There's never a time where it isn't good to try to push your leadership further to left—or at least hold them accountable for not democratically verifying what the workers want before they go ahead with a decision.”



ALE President Daniel Droop says rank and file members do not have to wait for permission from their union leaders to stand up for the Palestinian people.

Several major unions signed onto a letter last month calling on the Biden/Harris White House to stop sending military aid to Israel—saying in part, “It is clear that the Israeli government will continue to pursue its vicious response to the horrific attacks of October 7th until it is forced to stop.” The unions also insisted that “Israel’s refusal to minimize civilian harm and its demonstrated restriction of U.S. humanitarian aid call for a halt to U.S. military aid under the Foreign Assistance Act and the Arms Control Export Act.”

The American Postal Workers Union, Association of Flight Attendants, the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, the National Education Association, Service Employees International Union, and United Electrical Workers were all signatories of the letter, *the New York Times* reported.

In December, UAW Regional Director Brandon Mancilla stood alongside union President Shawn Fain in the nation’s capital and declared, “As long the bombing continues, it is our moral obligation to speak

Just last week, however, the Biden/Harris administration approved yet another massive arms package for Israel—this one worth \$20 billion and replete with F-15 fighter jets and tens of thousands of tank and mortar shells.

Daniel Kroop, president of the 400-member New York City Council Association of Legislative Employees [ALE] said the multi-billion weapons pact represents money not being spent to “uplift the lives of working people here—or abroad.”

“As the presidential campaign heats up we cannot—and will not—forget our siblings in Gaza,” he said on Sunday. “The UN independent international commission of inquiry already determined that Israel has committed war crimes and crimes against humanity—including starving a civilian population and targeting civilians. We will not stand by as a genocide unfolds.”



Kroop reminded trade unionists that they do not have to “wait for permission” from their union leadership before they act to stop the genocide.

“The union is the membership,” he said. “We don't allow our power to be taken away by union bureaucrats—we have the democratic right to be heard.”

Short of going on strike in solidarity with Palestinian workers—which he sees as “almost impossible to imagine,” due to existing labor law and difficulties organizing—Carr said the people he works with in Astoria are nevertheless pressing for a ceasefire and arms embargo in “small ways.”

At a brief work stoppage ahead of the latest round of bargaining with Starbucks managers, Carr said workers used social media and other means to “support the Palestinian people” and “connect our cause to theirs.”

“We're connecting that—even if we're not able to do a strike over it yet,” he said.

Kornbluh said that SAG-AFTRA members are going to keep pushing their leadership to “care about this issue” and to “care about the history of Hollywood dehumanizing the Muslim and Arab world.”

“We're just going to continue to build, and continue to fight as a rank and file movement to hopefully push our leadership to get there,” he said.

Sunday's rally and march at Cadman Plaza by the Not Another Bomb campaign was part of a larger national day of action taking place across the country.

The national Labor for Palestine network—one of the groups helping to organize rally and march—now consists of 40 different member groups around the country.

Group spokesperson and UAW member Michael Letwin said on Sunday that protesters will be on the ground in Chicago all this week to call out the Democratic Party's “complicity with genocide” and to urge unions pushing for an Israeli arms embargo and ceasefire to “put their money where their mouth is” and “stop endorsing the Harris/Walz slate.”

“Yes, union resolutions and statements to end the genocide are critical,” Letwin said. “But Palestinian workers are not looking for simple words—they are looking for action.”

The DNC used part of Monday night's event to adopt the party's official platform— it did not include an embargo on U.S. arms to Israel.