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After Local 3005's president resigns, members pass Israel divestment motion



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A member of District Council 37 holds a sign at a May Day protest. Members of DC 37 Local 3005 voted overwhelmingly to approve a motion calling for their pension fund to be divested from Israeli bonds and securities in a special meeting on Monday just days after the union's president resigned.

DUNCAN FREEMAN / THE CHIEF

Posted Tuesday, September 17, 2024 10:10 am

BY DUNCAN FREEMAN

Jeff Oshins, the president of District Council 37 Local 3005, resigned from his post Sept. 11, just days before the union was set to hold a special meeting to discuss divesting members' pensions from Israeli stocks and bonds.

The president of Local 3005 since it was formed in 2018, Oshins has yet to publicly cite a reason for his resignation as head of the roughly 1,000-member local. Some members were informed of Oshins' resignation on Sept. 12 by Samantha Rappa-Giovagnoli, the union's new president. Oshins, in a phone call with The Chief that day, said he had no comment.

After rank-and-file members felt that their discussions about divestment were being blocked by Oshins, 63 of them signed a petition that forced Oshins to schedule an open conversation on the topic. That followed nearly two years of conflict between Oshins

and rank and file members (<https://www.thechiefleader.com/stories/local-3005s-leadership-is-stillfling-rank-and-file-engagement-members-say,52826?>) who felt that the union leader was stifling member engagement and preventing internal discussion about the conflict in the Gaza Strip.

Rappa-Giovagnoli convened the pre-planned special meeting on divestment Monday night. Around 90 members voted overwhelmingly to pass a motion calling for divestment.

"Local 3005 shall support a statement of divestment of NYCERS pensions from all Israeli bonds and holdings in industries that fund and profit from the ongoing genocide in Palestine," the motion reads. Union leadership must post the motion on the local's website and send a letter to NYCERS board, according to the motion.

Members who attended the meeting said that there was over an hour of debate and discussion about the motion, the conflict in the Gaza Strip and possible legal ramifications. After a delay during which Rappa-Giovagnoli briefly left the meeting, 92 percent of members in attendance voted in support of the motion.

"I was frustrated at first but I'm glad with the outcome," said Adeeba A. Khan, a city research scientist who sanctioned the motion. "We were extremely happy when the motion passed. It felt like we were finally heard."

This is the first time a DC 37 local has passed a motion calling for divestment from Israeli stocks and bonds since the current conflict in the Gaza Strip began. In June, City Council staffers represented by the Association of Legislative Employees became the first group of public sector workers in the city to pass an Israeli divestment resolution. (<https://www.thechiefleader.com/stories/council-staffers-call-on-nycers-to-divest-from-israel,52586?>)

Rappa-Giovagnoli, the vice president under Oshins, did not return several phone calls or an email.

'Very much aligned'

Although he's left union leadership, Oshins plans to stay in his job as a city research scientist in the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. An automated response from his email read, in part, "effective 9/11/24, please note that I am no longer the President of Local 3005 since I have decided to step down."

Members involved in collecting signatures for Monday's meeting were blindsided by Oshins' resignation.

"Obviously it's very surprising, we were not anticipating this at all," said Kate Klein, a Local 3005 member who, like Oshins, works as a city research scientist at the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. "We wish Jeff the best."

But Klein said that she expects Rappa-Giovagnoli to be more sympathetic to rank and file engagement and open to having discussions on issues members are passionate about.

"As far as I can tell [Rappa-Giovagnoli and I] are very much aligned on being open, being transparent and allowing members to participate in meetings in a democratic manner," she said. "Samantha is much more aligned with our goals. She's always been open to new ideas."

Since Rappa-Giovagnoli has taken the union's reins, the local's website (<https://www.local3005.net/local-3005-nyc-department-health-and-mental-hygiene-and-office-chief-medical-examiner-ocme-0>) has been updated to reflect her position change and it now lists Kimani Barley as the vice president.

The website also now lists two chairpersons of the local's membership committee that, before Friday, were vacant posts.

Last year, some members asked Oshins to revive the membership committee to aid member onboarding and engagement. Oshins rebuffed that request and it sat dormant.

Oshins, a third-generation union member, is also a DC 37 executive board vice president.

Henry Garrido, DC 37's executive director, said that Oshins' resignation took him by surprise and that two have not spoken since the local president announced his resignation in an email. "Jeff is a good guy, he served well in his presidency," Garrido said, adding that he didn't know the reason for Oshins resignation.

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