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Just Like Every Other Injury

AN INJURY TO PALESTINE IS AN INJURY TO ALL

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SINCE OCTOBER 7, 2023, MANY in US labor have joined the massive outpouring against Israel's war of extermination in Gaza. This is a significant development in Palestine solidarity. Although Zionism never had a mass

working class following, US labor officials have long supported Zionism.¹ The American Federation of Labor, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers all supported the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which envisioned a Jewish national home” in Palestine,² and later championed the Histadrut, the Zionist labor federation that spearheaded anti-Palestinian apartheid, dispossession, and ethnic cleansing, including the *Nakba*.³

US labor officials’ Zionism reflected not only an affinity with the Histadrut’s socialist façade, but with US imperialism’s reliance on Israel’s self-proclaimed role as its “watchdog.” The US labor left’s most important elements echoed Stalin’s military and political support for establishing the Israeli state. Union leaders across the political spectrum supported Israeli wars, bought huge quantities of Israel Bonds, and smeared as antisemitic those who criticized Israel’s close alliance with apartheid South Africa.⁴

Since the end of World War II, Labor Zionism has been organized largely through the Histadrut’s US mouthpiece, the Jewish Labor Committee. While painting itself as progressive, the JLC has a long history of promoting Israel, US wars of empire, and domestic racism—including the 1968 New York City teachers strike against community control of schools and backlash against affirmative action.⁵ Led today by the Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union President Stuart Appelbaum, the JLC mobilized top US union officials to attack the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement.⁶

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF LABOR SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINE

In the US, the first major postwar challenge to Zionism emerged from the Black Power movement of the 1960s.⁷ In January 1969, the Detroit-based League of Revolutionary Black Workers championed the Palestinian struggle as part of worldwide resistance to racism and colonialism.⁸ In 1973, three thousand Arab autoworkers in Detroit held a wildcat strike to protest the United Auto Workers Local 600’s purchase of \$300,000 in Israel bonds, and they led the protest against B’nai B’rith’s “Humanitarian Award” for UAW President Leonard Woodcock.⁹

Labor solidarity with Palestine reemerged after 9/11.¹⁰ Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 10, whose majority Black membership had opposed apartheid South Africa, condemned Israel's attacks on the West Bank, calling for the halt of all military aid to Israel. New York City Labor Against the War (NYCLAW), a multiracial grassroots organization, called for an end to US military aid to Israel, Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, and support for the Palestinian right to return and Israeli military resisters. However, the dominant leadership of US Labor Against the War, founded in 2003, blocked proposals to support Palestine for fear of losing support from mainstream union leaders who had, however tepidly, opposed the impending invasion of Iraq.

In 2004, Al-Awda NYC, the Palestinian Right to Return Coalition, and NYCLAW jointly founded Labor for Palestine to promote respect for the BDS picket line.¹¹ During the intensified Israeli attacks on Gaza in 2010 and 2014, ILWU Locals 10 and 34 in Oakland refused to unload ships from ZIM, Israel's leading maritime shipping company. Soon after, UAW Local 2865 graduate students at the University of California, the United Electrical Workers (UE), and a small number of other labor bodies adopted pro-BDS statements, often with vocal support from anti-Zionist Jewish members.¹²

Following appeals from Palestinian unions in 2021, solidarity statements were issued by additional labor bodies.¹³ Meanwhile, Block the Boat, a community-labor alliance first launched in 2014 by the Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC), successfully prevented the Israeli ship *Volans* from docking anywhere on the West Coast,¹⁴ inspiring Block the Boat campaigns in other US and Canadian ports.¹⁵

PALESTINE LABOR SOLIDARITY SINCE OCTOBER 7

In the immediate wake of Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza, most labor officials remained silent—or worse. The growth of labor anti-Zionism, combined with mushrooming rank-and-file activism and union reform caucuses in recent years, produced unprecedented labor outcry against the carnage.

The leaderships of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 3000 and the UE launched a ceasefire petition in mid-October, which has been endorsed by at least 130 labor bodies, including the UAW and American Postal Workers Union.¹⁶ This shift from the labor officialdom's implacable Zionism has allowed other labor bodies to speak out against Israeli genocide. However, the petition failed to support Palestinian resistance to occupation, equated "the loss of life" and "warfare" between Israelis and Palestinians, and demanded the release of Israeli hostages without mentioning thousands of Palestinian hostages. Most problematically, it ignored the "Urgent Call from Palestinian Trade Unions: End all Complicity, Stop Arming Israel," and omits any reference to BDS.¹⁷

Meanwhile, a growing number of rank-and-file labor groups, many newly formed, have echoed the Palestinian trade union call: Amazon and Google Workers with the No Tech for Apartheid Campaign, Bronx Defenders Union–UAW Local 2325, Starbucks Workers United, Labor for Palestine, UAW Rank and File, and NYC Educators for Palestine.¹⁸ Strong anti-genocide and/or BDS resolutions also came from New York City Workers for Palestine, New York City Press Conference against AFL–CIO Zionism, Teamsters Mobilize (after being blocked from introducing a Gaza resolution to the Teamsters for a Democratic Union conference), Purple Up for Palestine, NYC Educators for Palestine, and the Amazon Labor Union Democratic Reform Caucus.¹⁹

However, as in 2014 and 2021, the most powerful response has been AROC's Block the Boat community–labor picket line, including ILWU Local 10's refusal to unload the *MV Cape Orlando*, a US military cargo ship transporting weapons to Israel in November.²⁰ Some twenty workers groups convened by Labor for Palestine and the Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM) endorsed a #LaborShutItDown4Palestine, which supports the Palestinian call to stop arming Israel and for labor BDS.²¹

PALESTINE IN A LABOR ISSUE

The Labor for Palestine/PYM call outlined why Palestine is a "union issue":

- An injury to one is an injury to all. The Israeli settler colonial regime is part of the same US-backed system of racist state violence that brutalizes BIPOC and working class people around the world.
- Our tax dollars arm Israel, with more than \$3.8 billion a year (more than \$10 million per day) in US military aid, tax dollars that should be spent instead on

jobs, food, housing, healthcare, education, and transportation for poor and working people at home.

- Since the 1920s, top labor officials have donated millions to the Histadrut and used member dues to buy billions in Israel Bonds.
- Workers can stop Israeli genocide. We need to respect the BDS picket line by protesting, bringing union resolutions, and—above all—mobilizing our collective power at the workplace, alongside dockers in South Africa, India, Sweden, Norway, Turkey, Italy, and Belgium, as well as on the US West Coast, who are respecting Block the Boat’s community picket line by refusing to handle Israeli cargo.

The critical role of rank-and-file pressure is clear in the UAW. For nearly two months after October 7, the newly formed UAW Labor for Palestine called on union leadership to take a stand against Israeli genocide. When the International Executive Board (IEB) finally issued a ceasefire statement in December, UAWL4P welcomed it and demanded the union uphold the Palestinian trade union call and endorse BDS.²²

Since then, the membership of Unite All Workers for Democracy, which had backed UAW President Shawn Fain’s election, has reiterated its earlier support for BDS and called for the inclusion of rank-and-file and Palestinian union members in the newly announced UAW Divestment and Just Transition Working Group.²³ Pro-BDS resolutions have also been adopted by UAW locals across the US.²⁴ UAWL4P has launched a public campaign calling on Fain to meet with Palestinian UAW members, and criticized UAW leadership—both old guard and reform—for having “taken no concrete steps to stop the production of weapons used to massacre Palestinians.”²⁵

In January, ignoring a call from more than six hundred union members “to only endorse and allocate our dues and V-CAP contributions to candidates who publicly call for a ceasefire,” the IEB announced its endorsement of Joe Biden’s reelection campaign.²⁶ When several members heckled Biden’s appearance, they were physically assaulted and dragged away by Secret Service agents. On January 31, 2024, UAWL4P called on the IEB to rescind its Biden endorsement and thereby stop crossing the Palestinian trade union picket line.²⁷

To strengthen such rank-and-file pressure for meaningful worker solidarity, activists are forming an inter-union Labor for Palestine National Network based on the points of unity of Labor for Palestine/Palestinian Youth Movement.²⁸ ×



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