

NEWS | ECONOMY & LABOR

United Auto Workers Vote to Divest From Israel in Historic Victory

The divestment vote makes the UAW the first major national union to vote to divest from Israel.

By Shireen Akram-Boshar, TRUTHOUT

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Pro-Palestinian protestors gather with a sign reading 'UAW Rank-and-File Workers For Palestine' after police cleared a new encampment of pro-Palestinian protestors on the UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) campus on May 23, 2024 in Los Angeles, California.

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The United Auto Workers (UAW), a union with some 400,000 active members across the U.S., has voted to divest its estimated \$400,000 from Israel bonds. The divestment vote makes the UAW the first major national union to vote to divest from Israel.

On Thursday, UAW members voted at the union's 39th Constitutional Convention in Detroit, where some 1,000 delegates from UAW locals around the country had gathered to discuss the union's strategy for the next four years.

UAW represents some 400,000 active members, largely in the U.S. but also in Canada and Puerto Rico. Members include workers in the auto industry and in higher education, as well as a significant number of health care workers and state and government workers.

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The resolution (<https://uniteallworkers4democracy.org/resolution-divest-israel-bonds/>) states that the “billionaire class” that “profits from war” funnels public money into militarism instead of “healthcare, housing and education working people need.” It cites the nearly three-year-long genocide in Gaza and the call by the Palestinian trade union movement for workers internationally to act in solidarity as among the reasons for its resolution to divest from Israel Bonds – which are bonds issued directly by Israel and function as loans to the Israeli government.

The vote (<https://dailystruggle.org/uaw-divests-from-israel-bonds/>) was organized by Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) (<https://uniteallworkers4democracy.org/>), a left-wing caucus within the UAW, and UAW Labor for Palestine, which is part of a broader Labor for Palestine coalition.

Olga Karounos, a member of the UAWD caucus and public defender from Brooklyn who made the motion to call the amendment to the floor, said (<https://www.detroitnews.com/story/business/autos/2026/06/18/uaw-israel-bond-divest-gaza-uawd-constitutional-convention/90610929007/?gnt-cfr=1&gca-cat=p&gca-uir=true&gca-epri=z117269p118850l002450e118850e1169xxv117269d--62--b--62--&gca-ft=215&gca-ds=sophi>) that “this is going to send a message to – not just the billionaire class – but to politicians and any single person who is not afraid to stand up to genocide, to Netanyahu, to the United States government, and will put the UAW again on the map for standing up for international solidarity.”

The UAW has a history of left-wing, rank-and-file action, including its divestment from South Africa in 1978. More recently, the UAW became the first major union to call for a ceasefire in Gaza in December 2023. It also formed a Divestment and Just Transition working group to study the history of Palestine as well as the union's economic ties to Israel. During the campus protest movement, members in New York and elsewhere organized in solidarity (<https://jacobin.com/2024/05/uaw-israel-palestine-solidarity-unions>) with students. In May 2024, however, a previous divestment vote by UAW's Executive Board – which includes its president, Shawn Fain – failed to secure divestment from Israel.

Navruz Baum, a legal services worker in New York City and member of Local 2325 and UAWD, told *Truthout* that the victory “is the result of years of organizing by UAWD and Labor for Palestine members,” and “stand[s] on the shoulders of decades of rank-and-file organizing, stretching back to the 1973 strike led by the Arab Workers Caucus and the fight for divestment at the 1974 UAW Constitutional Convention.”

At the time, Arab workers in the auto industry in Detroit were upset that the UAW had invested in some \$750,000 worth of Israeli bonds without rank-and-file approval, and began organizing to divest. The UAW leadership, however, ignored the workers’ demands, and its position only changed in 2023 after the start of Israel’s genocide brought rank-and-file pressure on the union.

“This vote is part of our effort to honor the call from Palestinian trade unions to support Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) and refuse complicity in genocide,” Baum told *Truthout*.

“UAWD brought divestment to the Convention as part of a broader class struggle program that also included proposals to fight mass layoffs, resist ICE raids, and support workers who take action to stop weapons shipments to Israel,” he continued – though the latter two proposals did not pass.

One UAWD member from Ohio had introduced an amendment at the Convention calling to support workers who strike to prevent weapons from reaching Israel, to set endorsement criteria for politicians, and to cut ties with Israel’s exclusivist, Jewish-only labor union, the Histadrut. This motion did not receive the votes needed to pass, however.

“UAW leadership tried to block our entire agenda,” Baum said. “But the success of the divestment amendment shows that more and more workers are realizing that the old playbook just won’t cut it. At a time when workers are facing layoffs, deportations, and an ongoing genocide in Palestine, we need a labor movement that’s willing to fight, take risks, and act in solidarity – not just issue statements and hope for the best.”

UAWD member Olga Karounos, whose family is Greek Orthodox, also said that Israel’s 2023 bombing of the Church of Saint Porphyrius in Gaza City motivated her union organizing efforts.

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