



Struggle-La-Lucha.org

Global worker solidarity: Unions mobilize to fight Israeli apartheid

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Oakland, June 5. Photo: Loay Dahbour

On May 18, in response to Israel's attempted expulsion of Palestinian families from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem, the continued attacks on the Aqsa Mosque as well as Israel's bombing of the Gaza Strip with more than 1,050 air raids, the [Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions - Gaza Strip \(PGFTU\)](#) urged the global trade union movement to support Palestinians and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

The PGFTU appeal called for labor unions to:

- Boycott Israel's racist occupation, including a refusal to unload its ships;

- Demonstrate and put the apartheid state of Israel on trial for war crimes;
- Affirm Palestinians' right to freedom and independence, the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, and the right of Palestinians to return to their homes and villages.

The appeal was answered forcefully in the Port of Oakland, Calif., site of the most successful labor action to date against the atrocities in Gaza.

The Israel-based ZIM ship Volans left the Port of Oakland on June 5 unworked after reportedly "meandering in circles, outside of the port," reports an Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC) press statement. The ZIM ship was unable to navigate through the united protest of community and labor.

ZIM is the world's 10th largest shipping company. ZIM is a major transporter of weapons to and from Israel.

The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 10 and the ship's clerks in ILWU Local 34, as well as the Port Truckers, honored picket lines coordinated by the Block the Boat Coalition, at times numbering over a thousand protesters. ZIM ships left the port unloaded after 16 days of picket lines.

"We are sending a strong message that profiteering from Israel's apartheid and ongoing violence against the Palestinian people will not be welcome in the Bay Area," said Lara Kiswani, executive director of AROC.

#BlockTheBoat actions protesting various Israeli ZIM ships have been planned in numerous other cities, including Los Angeles, Seattle, Houston, New York, Detroit and Philadelphia.

One labor statement at the end of May read, "The ILWU Northern California District Council stands in solidarity with Palestine and Palestinian communities across the

world who are fighting for justice.”

On June 6, in Elizabeth, N.J., hundreds defied heavy police pressure and joined a community picket and blocked the gate leading to the terminal where the ZIM ship Tarragona docked.

International solidarity

Workers’ organizations responded to the appeal of the Palestinian union federation as news of the horrendous Israeli massacre and courageous Palestinian defense circled the globe.

Protests took place in Italy, Greece, Ireland, Canada and South Africa. Over 100 labor and community organizations nationally and internationally endorsed #BlockTheBoat actions!

The International Dockworkers Council issued a statement strongly condemning the massacre of civilians and children in Palestine.

Recognizing apartheid in Israel, South African dockworkers heeded the PGFTU call and refused to offload ZIM cargo.

Italian dockworkers in Livorno refused to load an arms shipment onto a ZIM ship.

The Doro-Chiba rail workers union of Japan wrote, “We full-heartedly salute Local 10 for refusing to handle the freight from the ZIM ship Volans.”

Local 10 and Black union leadership

Speaking on the Local 10 action, retired ILWU leader Clarence Thomas said, “We affect the global economy.”

He said, “It was the longest action taken against an Israeli vessel using community

blockades at the Port of Oakland.

"The first Local 10 action was in response to the killing of unarmed people in international waters on board the ship Mavi Marmara, which was attempting to bring humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people in 2010."

In August 2016, an action to stop ZIM ships from unloading at the Port of Oakland was organized by Block the Boat for Gaza, a coalition of about 70 organizations led by AROC.

The action became a movement. A gigantic ZIM ship left the Bay Area of California unworked at that time. Rank-and-file members of Local 10 honored community picket lines for four days. Other ports from Los Angeles to Tacoma joined the "Block the Boat Movement."

At the June 4 mass picket in Oakland, Local 10 President Trent Willis discussed the history of the ILWU in terms of fighting racism against the Palestinians as well as against African Americans.

Call for the MWM

When it initiated the Million Worker March in 2004, ILWU Local 10 called on rank-and-file union members to "Mobilize in Our Own Name," the title of Clarence Thomas' new anthology.

African American union leaders from Local 10, joined by others in the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, organized the MWM with demands to fight racism, sexism, economic injustice and war.

They said that the only way workers can successfully struggle for their democratic rights is to organize independently from political organizations controlled by the bosses.

In 2004, the AFL-CIO leadership, in collusion with the Democratic Party, took national measures to sabotage the MWM by dishonestly claiming that it would interfere with union support for John Kerry's presidential election campaign.

In July 2020, the country erupted with protests, labor strikes and shutdowns against the police murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and numerous others.

The AFL-CIO "Racial Justice Task Force" announced a plan for "taking concrete action to address the long history of racism and police violence against Black people."

Last week the AFL-CIO quietly released its report, calling for police unions themselves to be the primary mechanism for reforming police practices. As spokespersons for the police unions often voice the loudest support for racist killer cops, the AFL-CIO report amounts to a hostile rejection of calls from progressive members for the federation to kick out police unions.

The progressive demand to exclude police organizations from the AFL-CIO rightfully asserts that workers' unions must be organized independently from the bosses and the repressive forces of the state that represent them. After all, who are the ones to bust workers' heads when they protest for a living wage?

The call to "Mobilize in Our Own Name" is the only way that workers can unite internationally against capitalist exploitation and U.S. imperialist aggression in support of Israeli apartheid.

Block the Boat actions hit U.S./Israeli interests at the "point of production" and prove that workers are in the most powerful position to enact change.

<https://www.facebook.com/AROCBayArea/videos/181969900514605>

Footage of just 1 of 6 gates that community and workers held down in solidarity with

Palestinian workers.

