

International labor solidarity with Palestine

written by Lallan Schoenstein

November 23, 2023



On Nov. 3, in the Port of Oakland, California, the U.S. military vessel MV Cape Orlando was delayed by protests.

An appeal from the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) for solidarity

On Oct. 16, the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) issued an urgent call for international trade unions to take action against governments, like the U.S., that are arming Israel with weapons for the impending carnage of 2.3 million people in Gaza and the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

The statement by the Palestinian trade unions called on all workers:

- To refuse to build weapons destined for Israel.
- To refuse to transport weapons to Israel.
- To pass motions in their trade union to this effect.
- To take action against companies who have contracts with your institution.
- Pressure governments to stop military trade with Israel and, as in the case of the U.S., funding it.

PGFTU urged: “The genocidal situation can only be prevented by a mass increase of global solidarity with the people of Palestine to restrain the Israeli war machine. We take inspiration from previous mobilizations by trade unions ... where global solidarity limited the extent of colonial brutality.”

Around the world, unions have been responding in solidarity with the people of Gaza and the West Bank, most often in opposition to the policies of their own governments.

Unions leading the labor movement in the U.S. advocating a ceasefire are the APU postal workers, the UAW auto workers Regions 6 and 9A, and the National Writers Union. A Starbucks Workers United leaflet read: “We Stand with Palestine.”

Other key unions are the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW); Electrical Workers (UE); and UFCW Locals 3000 and 520, which have initiated a [labor call for](#)

[a ceasefire](#). They are being joined by a growing list of labor organizations across the country, including SEIU-United Service Workers West (USWW.) The Western Mass Area Labor Federation AFL-CIO (WMALF) [voted unanimously](#) at its delegate body on Nov. 13 to call for a ceasefire in Gaza.

Teachers' unions, like those in Chicago, Massachusetts, Minneapolis, and San Antonio, have made passionate appeals for cessation of Israel's violent assault on children and families in Gaza. The [Student Workers of Columbia](#) have been organizing support for a "free Palestine."

On Oct. 20, a march co-sponsored by the [Movement of Rank-and-File Educators](#) (MORE), a caucus in the NY UFT, shut down Third Avenue, a major artery in New York City.

'Action at the point of production'

Ports are vital in the supply chain for arms and weapons to Israel. Coordination between communities and their local longshore unions is essential in operations carried out to block military shipping. It is generally understood that **union members are not permitted to cross community picket lines.** Organized [workers know](#) that an action at the "point of production" is the most successful.

On Nov. 3-4, in the **Port of Oakland**, California, and the **Port of Tacoma**, Washington, the U.S. military vessel MV Cape Orlando was delayed by protests after merchant marine workers told the Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC) about the ship's departure. It is a part of the U.S. fleet that is replenishing military stockpiles in Israel with tanks, armored personnel carriers, and mobile rocket launchers, as well as troop trucks, cargo trucks, and Humvees.

On Nov. 17, the San Francisco longshore union ILWU Local 10 unanimously passed a solidarity resolution: "A message to the PGFTU expressing our solidarity and

determination to take action in their defense consistent with our actions in the past and the ILWU's principled position of defending Palestinian rights. The UN calls Gaza an 'open air prison' of 2.2 million Palestinians. ... It is no surprise that there would inevitably be a rebellion."

"We additionally call on trade unions both nationally and internationally to support PGFTU, a ceasefire and an end to Israeli apartheid oppression," the resolution says. A Local 10 official will read the resolution to the Oakland and San Francisco city councils, and the union will encourage the ILWU international and district councils to pass similar resolutions.

Trent Willis, a current member and former president of Local 10, said: "Our members are very concerned with the news we're hearing about innocent civilians being killed in the Gaza Strip right now. And it's not only our membership, but there are protests going on all around this country for a ceasefire."

In San Francisco, on Nov. 17, the Inland Boatmen's Union (IBU) issued another resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire and the delivery of life-saving aid to meet the needs of millions of people in Gaza.

ZIM shipping

ZIM is the main commercial corporation shipping military supplies to Israel. It is one of the top ten largest shipping lines in the world. Workers in Palestine see ZIM as a strategic target, particularly in ports with direct routes to Israel.

Many military components enter and exit the U.S. via its East Coast ports - primarily New York/Newark, Savannah, Charleston, and the Port of Virginia. This is because military supply chains operate with components produced in Europe and assembled in the U.S. Also, these ports are typically unionized by the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA), which has not actively blocked ZIM ships.

On Nov. 17 in Norfolk, Virginia, a demonstration at the ZIM headquarters organized by the Southern Workers Assembly was highly successful, reportedly with a great turnout. With the demonstration beginning at 3 p.m., ZIM shut down and sent everyone home at 2 p.m.

The **Port of New Orleans** in Louisiana has economic ties with the Port of Ashdod in Tel Aviv, Israel. On Nov. 3, protesters gathered outside the annual State of the Port event at the Sheraton Hotel. Activists demanded that the Port administrators, along with local government officials, cut all ties with the Zionist apartheid state. Following Nov. 3, the activists launched an organization, New Orleans Stop Helping Israel's Ports (NOSHIP), which led a Nov. 16 march on the Port administration.

Around the world

The international union movement has been responding in solidarity actions.

Belgian trade unions were among the first to take action. In a joint press release, the [Belgian transport workers' unions](#) called on their members to refuse to load or unload arms shipments being shipped or flown to Israel. The Italian, Spanish, and French longshore unions were on board, along with the Belgian dockworkers.

Workers at the **Port of Barcelona** are refusing to load military equipment designated for Israel.

In the **Port of Melbourne**, Australia, Trade Unionists for Palestine are also blocking ZIM. The red, gold, and black flags of the Indigenous peoples of Australia are seen on the picket line. On Nov. 14, more than 50,000 people protested at the parliament in **Sidney**.

The **Liverpool dock workers** held a meeting with the community to talk about the war in Gaza and the West Bank. They passed a resolution defending the Palestinians and called for the end of the shipment of war materiel from Liverpool. They are

reaching out to other ports in Britain. Thousands of people have marched in Liverpool and Manchester, calling for an end to Israel's attacks in Gaza.

United Tech & Allied Workers of Britain (UTAW-CWU) answered the appeal from the Palestinian (PGFTU) for union solidarity by calling for the "international labor movement to end all complicity and take concrete action against arms supplies to Israel."

In Kent, England, more than 400 activists disrupted operations at a factory belonging to BAE Systems, a key weapons supplier to Israel. The largest weapons firm in Britain, BAE manufactures "active interceptor systems" for Israel's F-35 stealth combat aircraft.

United under the banner "Workers for a Free Palestine," British health workers, teachers, hospitality workers, academics, artists, and more — members of unions such as **Unite, Unison, GMB, the NEU, the BMA, the UCU, Bectu and the BFAWU** — halted BAE operations and called for an immediate end to Israel's bombardment of Gaza. They set up a picket line to prevent deliveries to the site.

The **Japanese union, Dora Chiba** (the National Railway Motive Power Union), supports the PGFTU call for solidarity. The union says, "We wholeheartedly support the fierce struggle of the Palestinian people." They pledged to fight their government's imperialist policies: the cause of oppression of the people and war. The Japanese government is one of those sending weapons and financial aid to Israel.

Similar actions are occurring all over the world. In **Brazil, CUT**, the largest trade union federation representing more than 7.4 million workers, passed a resolution pledging unwavering support for the Palestinians. The **Canadian** Union of Public Employees (CUPE) adopted a resolution calling for the government to "end its sale of arms to Israel." In **Colombia**, the miners' union wants a suspension of the supply

of all minerals and fuels to Israel. The Central Trade Union Council of **India** (AICCTU), representing more than 600,000 workers, is calling to unions for a boycott of arms shipments to Israel. In **Poland**, the largest confederation of trade unions (OPZZ) is calling for an end to military cooperation with Israel.

