

Where's the outrage over labor leader Chris Smalls' violent arrest by the IDF?

written by Mike Elk

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U.S. labor leader Christian Smalls sails on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla ship Handala on July 15, 2025. Photo: Tan Safi/ Freedom Flotilla Coalition

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media outlet in the U.S. when he successfully led the union drive at Amazon, not a single major media outlet has covered his violent detention by the IDF.

July 29 — On Saturday, [the Israel Defense Forces boarded the *Handala*, a ship associated with the Flotilla Freedom Coalition](#), that was attempting to reach [Gaza](#) with supplies for starving Palestinians. The IDF detained 21 activists, who had their hands held up, in graphic images that were captured by the Freedom Flotilla Coalition.

Among those on the ship was Chris Smalls, who gained fame when he led a successful union drive at Amazon in Staten Island in 2022. [Former U.S. President Joe Biden even invited Smalls to meet with him at the White House to strategize on union organizing in 2022.](#)

On Monday, details emerged that not only was Smalls detained, but he was physically beaten by the IDF. He was the only Black member of the Freedom Flotilla on the *Handala*.

“The Freedom Flotilla Coalition confirms that upon arrival in Israeli custody, U.S. human rights defender, Christian Smalls, was physically assaulted by seven uniformed individuals,” [wrote the Freedom Flotilla Coalition on Instagram](#). “They choked him and kicked him in the legs, leaving visible signs of violence on his neck and back.”

Still, despite Smalls having been profiled by [every major media outlet in the U.S. when he successfully led the union drive at Amazon](#), not a single major media outlet has covered his violent detention by the IDF three days ago.

In 2022, [The New York Times even ran a Style section profile on his fashion choices among more than a dozen pieces that they ran on his organizing efforts](#), but the paper has not said anything about the detention and beating of a high-profile labor activist at the hands of the IDF. Only three smaller left-leaning outlets, [Zeteo](#), [The Grio](#), and [Jezebel](#), covered it.

“This totally makes sense,” [wrote University of New Brunswick Professor Nathan Kalman-Lamb on Bluesky](#). “A notable public figure in the U.S. (Amazon labor organizer Christian Smalls) is illegally arrested by [Israel](#) and subjected to severe physical violence while on a hunger strike... and not one U.S. media outlet of any type has decided that is news.”

Some union leaders have already begun to speak out about his detention.

“As a union, we are demanding the immediate release of Chris Smalls and all captured activists,” [said the 29,000-member California Faculty Association in a statement late Monday](#). “We further call for an immediate end to the engineered famine and deliberate starving of the people in Gaza, labor complicity with genocide, and all U.S. military aid to Israel”.

Other unions are expected to denounce the beating and detention of Smalls by the IDF.

However, his international union leader, Teamsters union president Sean O’Brien, has stayed silent on the detention of Smalls, who founded the Amazon Labor Union, which is now an affiliate of the Teamsters.

Instead, the Teamsters President Sean O’Brien took to social media to advertise his upcoming interview with [fascist commentator Vivek Ramaswamy and his 3 million right-wing followers](#).

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