



Union opposition to genocide in Palestine grows

By Otis Grotewohl
November 14, 2023

Workers World has written previously about union solidarity with Palestinian workers. (workers.org/2023/10/74274, workers.org/2023/10/74438) Now, more labor organizations in the U.S. and Canada have made public statements.

The American Postal Workers Union (APWU) — the world's largest postal workers union — became the second international union in the U.S. to openly call for a cease-fire in Gaza. The first union to bravely do so was the historically left-wing United Electrical Workers (UE), which, along with United Food and Commercial Workers Local 3000, initiated a labor petition calling for a cease-fire in mid-October. Over a dozen local, state and regional union bodies, and tens of thousands of labor activists, have signed the petition.

APWU's President Mark Dimondstein is Jewish and anti-Zionist, and he has long been an outspoken critic of the settler-colonial state of Israel. He recently clashed with many other AFL-CIO leaders for their one-sided condemnation of Palestinians. Dimondstein, who is popular among the rank and file, sent out a statement on Nov. 8 with two other APWU general officers saying, "We join the calls for an immediate ceasefire, the release of hostages, and urgently needed massive humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza. The cries of humanity demand nothing less." (apwu.org, Nov. 8).

One day before, on Nov. 7, the Executive Committee of the Committee of Interns and Residents (CIR) — a Service Employees Union affiliate that represents clinical physicians — issued a letter that concludes by insisting, "Stop any military action that will result in further loss of life, including the ground invasion, bombing, and the use of white phosphorus on civilians. Protect all healthcare workers and infrastructure from harm." (CIR, Nov. 7)

While moderate when compared to some of



PHOTO: LABOUR 4 PALESTINE

Canadian unionists march in a recent pro-Palestine demonstration.

the statements of trade unions in other countries, the resolutions from U.S. unions calling for a cease-fire are courageous for challenging the official line of most AFL-CIO unions, which is pro-Israel or at best no position at all.

Canadian trade unions overwhelmingly defend Palestine

In contrast to many U.S. unions, Canadian trade unions are overwhelmingly expressing solidarity with the workers of Palestine.

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), the largest public sector union in Canada, passed an emergency resolution at its convention in October that slams Israel and sympathizes with Palestinians. In addition to demanding an immediate cease-fire in Gaza, it also proposes a halt on arms sales to Israel and to end Israel's virtual "diplomatic immunity" within the United Nations. Several other Canadian unions signed on to CUPE's statement.

Meanwhile, Canada's largest federal government workers' union, the Public Service Alliance of Canada, also called for a cease-fire. PSAC and The Hamilton and District Labour Council have both boldly called for an end to the racist Zionist occupation of Palestinian land, which includes Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The HDLC "calls for an immediate cease-fire in the Middle East and we reaffirm our position for an end to the occupation of Palestinian territories."

(Canadian Dimension, Nov. 7)

Canada's biggest private sector union, Unifor, put out a more moderate position that, like the statement from CIR in the U.S., falls short of using the word "cease-fire." It states that, "Unifor joins the international community in expressing profound grief at the mounting loss of life in Israel and Gaza and are urgently calling for an end to violence." While weaker than the resolutions of many leading Canadian unions, Unifor's position is still stronger than that of most unions in the U.S. (Unifor.org, Oct. 17)

The Canadian group Labour 4 Palestine is calling on the Canadian Labour Congress to take a pro-Palestine position.

The danger of "condemning" Hamas

A common but dangerous mistake made by a number of liberal and progressive people who claim to want a "free Palestine" is the tendency to criticize Hamas. Labor activists are not immune from this phenomenon, and it is reflected in some of the trade union statements calling for a cease-fire, including some statements from U.S. unions.

In another example, CUPE President Fred Hahn became the target of right-wing Zionists and Islamophobic bigots after making pro-Palestinian posts on social media. CUPE has participated in pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Canada, and one of Hahn's Instagram posts featured the chant, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free." The post made reactionaries fume and many immediately called Hahn a "terrorist."

Rather than consistently focus his anger on imperialism and settler-colonialism, Hahn issued a public apology on Oct. 21 stating, "Hamas committed a horrific terrorist attack on civilians in Israel. On the day immediately following that, I tweeted about resistance. The timing was wrong. That was an error, and I apologize." (readthemapple.com, Oct. 23)

Hahn should not have felt compelled to apologize. Right-wing bigots hate Hahn

Salute students who fight genocide

Editorial

November 13, 2023

The mass revulsion at Israeli terror in Gaza has unleashed a conflict on U.S. college campuses, where student activists confront not only pro-Israel students, but also college administrations and wealthy donor alumni who have targeted student groups that oppose Israel's genocidal attack.

Confrontations have disrupted many campuses, including at public colleges, where nearly all the students come from the working class, and those considered elite, such as Ivy League colleges and some California universities.

Since a greater percentage of their students come from ruling-class backgrounds, most media coverage goes to the "elite" schools: Stanford, University of California Los Angeles, University of Pennsylvania, Yale, Harvard and Columbia. Those who run U.S. capitalist society expect many students at these schools to continue running the economy and the state.

When students at these universities rebel, it's big news. And they have rebelled. It also involves big money. And the billionaires have demanded the students be punished. In some cases they even demand the students be identified so they can be denied jobs or harassed where they live.

This reached a turning point at Columbia University in New York City. Columbia's administration banned the two main Palestine solidarity organizations, Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and Jewish



Columbia Univ. students rally for Palestine, NYC, Oct. 12, 2023.

Voice for Peace (JVP).

While the administration gave the usual phony pretext — some rule being broken, you can always find one — it was miles from the real reason they were banned: They refused to swallow the official lies about Palestine and/or they refused to be complicit with Israeli genocide, which they can watch every night in news reports and on social media.

Although the reactionary donors parrot the false claim of the Israeli government and U.S. imperialism that the activist students are "antisemitic," the truth is much different. Neither SJP nor JVP ideology identifies being Jewish with supporting a Zionist state that settles people of one religion while expelling people of other religions.

Working-class organizations admire these and similar student groups' courage, just as we do the organizations at the public universities, such as those in the City University of New York. They are confronting not only the

U.S.-armed Israeli genocide but also the rulers of all Western imperialist countries, whose elites consider the Israeli state an extension of their own exploitation of West Asia.

Palestine Writes Festival

Since the pro-Israeli alumni donors at UPenn mobilized weeks before Oct. 7, more has been revealed about them. They tried to stop the Palestine Writes Literature Festival, held in late September, in an attempt to repress Palestinian culture with the usual pretext that this was "antisemitic." They failed.

Simply because the university allowed the Festival to proceed, a big donor from the Estée Lauder corporation and a private equity billionaire have tried to use their money's power to punish the university and determine its policy, even about which professors are hired. Estée Lauder, by the way, has been on the list of companies to boycott for their ties to the Israeli state.

The conflict over events in Gaza has exposed the perverse role of big money in the university system intrinsic to U.S. capitalism. Now students, activists and sympathizers, face another choice: Do they bow to the threats to their financial future or do they continue to fight against the U.S./Israeli genocide?

Many have already made the choice to continue the struggle. Perhaps the attempt at repression will boomerang against the rulers, just as it did during another criminal U.S. war in 1968. We in Workers World salute the students from CUNY to UCLA who are fighting U.S.-Israeli terror. □

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Continued from other side

simply for being a militant union leader, and even more so for being one that opposes genocide against the Palestinian people. Reactionaries would have associated Hahn and his union with Palestinian resistance, even if he didn't make that post.

Hamas, also known as the Islamic Resistance Movement, is the governing organization in Gaza that received the largest percentage of votes in the legislative elections in 2006. While all its members are Sunni Muslims, it is supported by many Palestinians who are not. Those who champion self-determination should defend Palestinian people's right to determine their own destiny.

It is not up to workers in the U.S. and Canada to dictate who represents oppressed people in other countries, or what tactics they

use. Our responsibility as proletarians in the imperialist countries of North America should be to fight our own ruling class and to support whatever strategy oppressed people in other countries — and our own — choose to resist their ongoing plunder and oppression.

Marxist-Leninists have long held that one cannot equate violence of the oppressed with violence of the oppressors. Liberals, pacifists and social democrats have a history of making this critical error. Such mistakes only play into the hands of the imperialists and racist colonizers.

When the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions released a call on Oct. 16 urging unions in other countries to put pressure on Israel and to stop military aid to the settler state, they did not ask anyone to criticize or condemn Hamas.

It is up to the most advanced and

revolutionary-minded labor activists to help move their union siblings in a direction that expresses concrete solidarity with Palestinian liberation, as some unions have already done. Three reasonable demands that all unions should make is to call for an immediate ceasefire, for an end to military aid to Israel, and for an end to the brutal Zionist occupation of Palestine! □

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