British trade union leaders silent on Palestinian trade unions' call for solidarity action against Israeli war machine

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Faced with continued atrocities against the Palestinians in Gaza by the Israeli military, backed to the hilt in Washington and London, trade union leaders in the UK have maintained a deathly silence on a vital call for solidarity action to stop the war machine.

On Monday the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions Gaza (PGFTU) and 31 other unions and professional associations issued an appeal to their counterparts around the world, "An Urgent Call from Palestinian Trade Unions: End All Complicity, Stop Arming Israel."

The open letter is a direct call to the working class to come to the defence of the Palestinians and halt the Israeli military assault. It explains how "Western states" have amplified "Israel impunity" in expanding war crimes that have claimed the lives of at least 4,000 Palestinians—including the systematic bombing of civilians, the use of lethal chemical white phosphorous and collective punishment cutting off water, food, fuel and medical supplies to the 2.3 million people of Gaza.

"This urgent, genocidal situation can only be prevented by a mass increase of global solidarity with the people of Palestine and that can restrain the Israeli war machine."

The *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) wrote on October 18 to the leaders and executives of three major trade unions about the appeal for solidarity action made by the PGFTU—Mick Lynch of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT), Sharon Graham of Unite and Dave Ward of the Communication Workers Union (CWU). The reputation of these leaders has been burnished by the media and pseudo-left groups to maintain the lie that champions of the cause of workers exist in the trade union bureaucracy.

The WSWS letter cited the demands made by the PGFTU and requested an urgent response:

1. To refuse to build weapons destined for Israel.
2. To refuse to transport weapons to Israel.
3. To pass motions in their trade union to this effect.
4. To take action against complicit companies involved in implementing Israel's brutal and illegal siege, especially if they have contracts with your institution.
5. Pressure governments to stop all military trade with Israel, and in the case of the US, funding it.

The WSWS has received no reply. Neither have Lynch, Graham and Ward seen fit to publish any public response to the appeal by the Palestinian trade unions' open address.

The RMT has not produced a single public statement against the siege of Gaza. This is particularly inexcusable as it represents uniformed civilians in the Royal Auxiliary Fleet pressed into service as part of the UK "task group" dispatched to the region—to assist Israel in tightening the noose around Gaza and as part of a US armada of warships threatening military action against Iran, Syria and Lebanon.

The Conservative government's press release on October 13, "Prime Minister deploys UK military to Middle East to support Israel", was unequivocal. It states:

"The military package, which includes P8 aircraft, surveillance assets, two Royal Navy ships—RFA Lyme Bay and RFA Argus—three merlin helicopters and a company of Royal Marines, will be on standby to deliver practical support to Israel and partners in the region, and offer deterrence and assurance."

The RFA Argus is a hospital ship with 100 beds, touted by the Sunak government as capable of providing humanitarian assistance. However, *Forces Net* writes, "RFA Lyme Bay… is a landing ship dock, capable of delivering a fighting force anywhere in the world."

The task force joins two Royal Navy warships already

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in the region—HMS Duncan in the eastern Mediterranean and HMS Lancaster in the Persian Gulf.

The RMT issued an internal letter to branches from Lynch on October 18—ten days after the Israeli onslaught began. Under pressure from members due to its complete inaction, it announced that the RMT would be part of a trade union contingent on the mass protest in London this Saturday. Eddie Dempsey, RMT Assistant General Secretary and a leading Stalinist, will speak. This is cover for the RMT's refusal to lift a finger in terms of mobilising British workers to defend their brothers and sisters in Gaza.

Rather than organising any opposition to the escalation of the British naval blockade of Gaza, the RMT's letter concludes, "Finally, it is important to note that the union has members serving on Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships that have been sent to the region and the union will do all it can to support and protect the welfare of our members."

No action is proposed against the Sunak government and Labour's license for Israel to commit further atrocities, with a pro-forma appeal made for "the British Government to stop its support of hostilities including halting of UK arms sales to Israel to bring about immediate peace and a just settlement based on UN resolutions and international law."

Unite members have likewise been prevented from taking any action by Graham against the government's continued supply of arms to the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). Unite represents thousands of workers in the UK arms industry such as BAE Systems, which provides up to 15 percent of the parts to the F35 Lockheed Martin stealth combat aircrafts raining death on Gaza.

Graham has been among the most vociferous backers of the NATO proxy war against Russia, supporting along with Unison in 2022 the decision by dockers not to unload Russian oil and gas tankers. Unite rallies have been decked out in the Ukraine flag.

However, in the face of the genocide threatening Palestinians, no action is to be taken which would cut across the continued support for British imperialism. Unite's October 16 press release instead "renews its calls for the British government to work for peace, for the respect of international law and to find a pathway towards a two state settlement and a peaceful, democratic solution to the conflict."

The CWU has confined itself to reposting statements of the Trades Union Congress on Gaza, geared to maintaining the fiction that British imperialism is not fully complicit in war crimes and blocking any action by the more than 6 million workers it covers. References to the United Nations' call for de-escalation and a ceasefire are a political smokescreen to excuse inaction, representing tacit support.

The eruption of mass anti-war sentiment against Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza and Britain's collusion has deepened the chasm between working people and the privileged strata of the trade union bureaucracy.

At the recent Labour Party conference, Lynch, Graham and Ward pulled out every stop to bolster leader Sir Keir Starmer and the election of Labour as the only way to protect embattled workers from the Sunak government. But events of the last week have confirmed that Labour functions as a de facto coalition party of war with the Tories.

For the past year Labour has worked with the union bureaucracy to derail and betray a powerful strike wave of 2 million workers, preventing any unified action and delivering one sell-out agreement after another on the rail and in the postal service, education and the National Health Service. This has provided a fresh lesson in its chief role of suppressing the class struggle and the need for a rank-and-file rebellion by workers.

The warmongers must be disarmed by the working class through a co-ordinated international mobilisation. We urge workers to refuse to manufacture, distribute or provide any essential goods and services to Israel as it prepares a devastating ground offensive.

Workers in the defence industry should organise a boycott of arms or components to equip the IDF. Dockworkers, airport and transport workers should refuse to handle weapon shipments. Civilian sailors should not be placed in harm's way to transport British troops as part of the escalating military build-up. This must be combined with a political fight to bring Sunak and Starmer before the International Criminal Court, along with all other war criminals.

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