

Belgian airport unions call to stop handling arms shipments to Israel

Alex Lantier

2 November 2023

On October 31, a coalition of Belgian airport ground crew unions called on their members to stop handling weapons shipments to Israel. Nearly a month after the Israel-Gaza war erupted, this marks the only significant response to date by unions in NATO imperialist countries to the October 16 appeal of the Palestinian trade unions to block the arming of Israel.

The Belgian unions' statement, titled "Refusal to transport military material destined for war in Palestine," notes that "workers in various Belgian airports are seeing weapons going to war zones. The loading and unloading of these weapons resupplies organizations that kill innocent people." On this basis, it calls on their members to refuse to load or unload weapons destined for Israel:

We, the different trade unions involved in ground transport, are asking our members to no longer service flights transporting military material towards Palestine/Israel, as at the beginning of the conflict with Russia and Ukraine, based on clear accords and rules.

We thus call for an immediate cease-fire and we ask the Belgian government to be consistent and not to tolerate the transit of weapons shipments through Belgian airports. As trade unions, we declare our solidarity with those campaigning for peace.

The statement was issued in Flemish and French, Belgium's two official languages. The Flemish version was signed by locals affiliated to the Confederation of Christian Unions (ACV), Belgium Transport Union (BTB, UBT in French), the Association of Employees

Technicians and Managers (BBTK), and Transcom. In French it was signed by locals linked to the National Employees Union (CNE), the Employees Technicians and Managers Union (SETCa), and Transcom.

A message on X/Twitter reposting this statement by Peter Martens, the leader of the Maoist Belgian Workers Party (PTB), has received nearly 6 million views. This points to the enormous interest and support for working class struggle against war and oppression being evoked internationally.

The initiative of the Belgian airport ground crew unions exposes the inaction of the national union bureaucracies in the principal NATO imperialist powers. America, Germany, Britain and France are sending Israel hundreds of millions or billions of dollars in arms to be used against Gaza. Yet the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), the German Union Federation (DGB), Britain's Trades Union Congress (TUC) and France's General Confederation of Labor (CGT) have taken no action.

Outrage is mounting among workers and youth internationally against Israel's genocidal war in Gaza. Mass protests of hundreds of thousands of people are unfolding in major cities across America, Europe and the Middle East. Belgian airport workers, in particular, have pressed for job actions against European corporate support for Israel.

On October 16, the 221 Belgian flight crew staff at Ryanair voted unanimously against resuming flights from Charleroi, Belgium to Tel Aviv, Israel. CNE delegate Ivan Bomfin explained: "If it was to organize humanitarian flights, we would have volunteered, no problem. ... But now Ryanair is playing with our lives just for money. They want to fly 'tourists,' or God knows what type of passengers, into a war zone,

charging them 10 times more than the usual price. It is crazy.”

But the Israeli government has reacted to the international outpouring of opposition to its genocidal policies by escalating its atrocities against the Palestinians in Gaza, repeatedly bombing hospitals and refugee camps.

Appeals to the Israeli and NATO governments to stop the mass murder of innocents are useless. The way to stop the genocide, as the initiative in Belgium shows, is to mobilize the industrial power of the international working class to force an end to the war.

On October 17, the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) in Gaza issued an international appeal to trade unions internationally to intervene to stop the war on Gaza. The PGFTU called on trade unions in relevant industries in countries around the world

1. To refuse to build weapons destined for Israel.
2. To refuse to transport weapons to Israel.
3. To pass motions in their trade unions 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. To pressure governments to stop all military trade with Israel, and in the case of the US, funding to it.

The reaction to the PGFTU’s appeal makes clear that workers around the world cannot wait for the union bureaucracies to organize industrial action against the war. The main national confederations in America, Germany, Britain and France have organized no action whatsoever against the genocide. It is only in Belgium that a series of union locals in a strategically located industry have proposed a concrete form of action.

Their call by itself is, moreover, only the beginning of a serious struggle of the European and international working class against the war in Gaza.

Broader support must be mobilized among workers, in Belgium and internationally, to defend Belgian

workers who take up the call to refuse to handle weapons shipments to Israel. They will inevitably face retaliation from employers and also from the Belgian government. Right-wing Prime Minister Alexander de Croo has stressed that his government supports “Israel’s right to defend itself against this barbarism” and is currently trying to pass an anti-democratic “anti-hooligan” law to limit workers’ ability to participate in public protests.

It is critical to not only carry out acts of civil disobedience but also to prepare strike action. This will allow the working class to bring fully to bear its industrial power against the Gaza war and genocide. This will inevitably entail mounting a political struggle against the capitalist governments of the NATO powers, including the de Croo government in Belgium, who support the Israeli war effort and excuse the war crimes of the Israeli regime.

Above all, a struggle against the Israeli-NATO onslaught is necessarily international in scope. To wage it, workers’ struggles cannot remain confined within the suffocating national framework of the union bureaucracies. They must build rank-and-file committees to coordinate opposition against war, capitalist reaction and police-state rule and unify their struggles into an international struggle against imperialism and capitalism and for socialism.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)