

“We must resist as the working people ... it can't happen without us. They need us.”

Powerful appeal to workers at Port of Oakland stalls military vessel en route to Israel

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3 November 2023

Militant action undertaken by hundreds of residents of Oakland, California, on Friday stalled the *Cape Orlando*, a military supply ship bound for Israel, for several hours at the Port of Oakland. The powerful protest, which began early in the morning, spread quickly on social media, garnering worldwide support among workers and all people of conscience.

The *Cape Orlando* was built in 1981 and used repeatedly in support of US military operations in Iraq from 2003 through 2004.

As news of the protest action began to spread online, demonstrators near *Cape Orlando* made special appeals to workers on the ship to refuse cargo. Throughout the protest, passing truck drivers honked their horns in support.

Social media indicates at least one worker expressed strong sympathy with the protesters' demands to stop transporting suspected war cargo to Israel. Other unconfirmed reports indicate one worker may have walked off the ship in solidarity with the protest.

While the protest was overwhelmingly peaceful, as it began to grow, Oakland police and California Highway Patrol, along with elements of the US Coast Guard, surrounded the protesters and made multiple arrests.

The protest was organized by the Bay Area Arab Resource & Organizing Center (AROC) and other local organizations. An AROC organizer told local media that an inside source had tipped them off that the *Cape Orlando* would be picking up military equipment in Oakland and then docking at the Port of Tacoma, Washington, before heading to Israel.

After protesters, some of whom had used a ladder to lock onto the ship, were arrested, the *Orlando* left. On social media appeals have already been made to dockworkers in Tacoma and other sections of the working class to “block the boat” and refuse to load the *Orlando*.

The *Cape Orlando* is part the US Ready Reserve Fleet, which is operated by the Maritime Administration under the Department of Transportation. While the *Orlando* is no longer under the control of the US Navy (it is operated by a private corporation), the vessel is still owned by the US government and crewed by US civilian workers.

Roughly four of these supply ships are pre-positioned at ports across the United States to provide rapid logistical support for US imperialism and its allies around the world. That the *Orlando*, an over 50-year-old ship, is being put to use, is an indication of the massive amounts of weaponry the

US government is shipping to Gaza and Ukraine war fronts.

Friday's protest was not the first time AROC has been involved in a significant action at the Port of Oakland. For nearly a decade, AROC has organized with International Longshore Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 10 to block Israeli-owned ships from transferring cargo at the port. However, Friday's demonstration appears to be the first time it has organized a protest against a US government-operated vessel.

While rank-and-file dockworkers apparently participated in the protest, as of this writing the president of the ILWU, Willie Adams, has yet to make a statement on the intervention. While it took less than two weeks last year for Adams to issue a statement condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine, he has yet to make a similar statement on the ongoing genocide in Palestine.

Unlike with Russian cargo, which Adams ordered on March 3, 2022 to not be loaded or unloaded at all 29 West Coast ports worked by ILWU members, Adams has not called on dockworkers to refuse to handle Israeli-bound military cargo. This is despite the October 16 call from the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions Gaza (PGFTU) and 31 other unions, which appealed to workers around the world to “End All Complicity, Stop Arming Israel.” This call was followed two weeks later by a coalition of Belgian airport ground crew unions, who issued a statement confirming their “refusal to transport military materiel destined for war in Palestine.”

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality strongly support Friday's action and are calling for working class action to stop the shipment of any items to Israel that could have any military use. As Joseph Kishore, SEP national secretary in the US, said at a rally at Wayne State University on Thursday, “The massive social power of the international working class must be mobilized in a political general strike, to shut down production and stop this genocide.

“We urge all of you ... to organize delegations to go to the factories, to go to the workplaces, to go to the high schools, to connect the fight against Israel's genocide to the developing struggles of workers all over the world against inequality and exploitation.”

Reporters for the *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed several people who took part in Friday's historic protest and distributed many statements

calling on the working class to stop the genocide in Gaza. The WSWS statements, along with the call for the international working class to lead the struggle against imperialist war, resounded strongly with a majority of the protesters.

Suzanne said, "I'm here today because brave people of conscience in the Bay Area have decided that it's imperative to block the boat, the military vessel, from going off and sending weapons back to Israel, especially in the midst of what's going on right now.

"The bombs Israelis are dropping in Gaza are bombs that are supplied by the US government, and it's backed by \$3.8 billion in US aid. I think [Biden's request for \$105 billion] is really disgusting ... it's very shameless and honestly, at this point, shocking.

"Usually we're not shocked by the US pouring all its money and resources into war and killing people. But at this level, 9,000 people have been killed ... meanwhile, here in the US, we don't have money for our schools, we don't have money for healthcare, people cannot live a life here because the US government treats them as if they are disposable. The United States government treats people here as disposable and it treats it, Israel, like a beacon, that it has to support at all costs to slaughter Palestinians so that it can maintain its imperialist outpost in the Middle East."

Suzanne called on workers to "stand up, rise against this tide of fascism," adding, "it's important for workers around the world and all people of conscience. It is in everybody's interest to stop the genocide that is happening and to end the siege on Gaza and to end US military aid to Israel."

Natalie told the WSWS, "That boat is filled with bombs that are going to kill innocent Palestinian children, and I'm just hoping to get more involved in direct actions like these because I've been going to protests, but I feel like we need direct actions like this. We need to really take money away from Israel. It's been an apartheid state since its foundation, and it wouldn't exist without the United States. We need to understand the history behind this. It's not just like history started on October 7th."

Asked to comment on Biden's \$105 billion World War III package for Ukraine and Israel, Natalie said, "I think it's absurd. It's unacceptable that we give billions of dollars to Israel every year, and it's unacceptable that we're trying to increase the amount that we give to them. Netanyahu and all of Israel is committing war crimes, not only in Gaza, settlers are running wild in the West Bank too."

Natalie added, "I think we need to unite. I think there's so much power in workers coming together. That is the source, right? Collective ... coming together, that's a source of power."

Another protester, who asked to be identified as "B," said they were "here in solidarity with Palestinian kin." "B" explained that this struggle was part of "the current wars and crimes that are going on against Haiti and the Congo and Sudan.

"All of our movements are interconnected, and we should be showing up and showing solidarity. The US imperialist and capitalist system cares only when their bottom line is hit. So I think it's important for us to continue to interrupt and intercept these type of actions and do what we can to push back and fight back and remember that the imperialists own the paperwork to the businesses, *but we run them*.

"As soon as we remember that and harness that, we can take back everything because we run it all. We just need to end the mental slavery and take back our power. And I feel like that is the beginning of the

liberation movement. ... I think we're in the middle of it and we have a lot further to go. It's a marathon, not a sprint.

"I think that if we got all of the major truck drivers, all of the major train workers, all of the folks who are controlling how commerce moves in this country, and if everyone said we're not going to work ... then they're going to have to listen because they're not going to get in the trucks and drive it. They're not going to move it.

"So we have the keys to freedom, we just have to know when to use them and how to use them."

Another protester, Kenya, told the WSWS, "I'm here because I can't stand by and allow the US to aid this genocide anymore. I'm from Oakland, and Oakland doesn't stand for this. We don't stand for genocide.

"I feel like striking, I feel like as the working class, if we can all come together and fight against this, this doesn't happen without us and our existence. If we don't go to work, if we show up to stuff like this, this can't happen. They need us to survive. This empire, this imperialism does not exist without our hands. And all the blood is on their hands. So we must resist. We must resist as the working people. We cannot stand by and allow this to happen. Because... it can't happen without us. They need us."

Asked to comment on the blackout of the global protests against the Gaza genocide, Kenya said, "I think it's amazing that everybody is waking up and starting to realize that media censorship is real.

"If you guys don't know, there's a protest at Meta [the parent company of Facebook] headquarters tonight. Meta is responsible for a lot of the censorship that's been going on all around the world. Everybody's voices, including the people in Gaza, on the ground, their voices have been censored. Instagrams are getting taken down. My views are extremely low. We're all being shadow-banned. The censorship is real, and this is what is preventing everybody from knowing the truth.

"I'm angry because we supposedly have no money for health care. We supposedly have no money for student loans. We supposedly have no money to help get all these people that are in prison in our own country, these people living in captivity in our own country. We have no money for anything that we as the people, as the working class, need. It's a necessity. People are not even able to survive in our country, and our taxes, our money is going to support the genocide of people all over the world. It's not just Palestine, it's Sudan, it's the Congo. And these things, our tax money can no longer support this.

"Free Palestine, free Congo, free Sudan, free everybody who is colonized. Free all of us living in this belly of the empire, of this imperialist, disgusting empire that we live under."

Ben explained "my boss is Palestinian, and I was in the United States Army and my boss was also in the United States Army. He was a reservist. We were both infantry, and I came out here to just show a little bit of support, take some pictures of some signs that I agree with and stand here in solidarity with these people.... They're not getting the rights and the freedom that they deserve, and that's why I'm here.

"I'm a United States Army veteran. I was infantry. Do I support what's going on? Hell no. Do I support our tax dollars going to Israel? Hell no. I feel like it's not our problem.

"We have a fentanyl epidemic, and we had a COVID outbreak ... and then we're going to send money to support another country which blows up

refugee camps? Israel didn't airstrike a refugee camp because a Hamas leader was in the area."

Ben concluded, "For the working class, as a working class person, I got your back. I love you, I support you, and I'll always have your back."



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