

AFL-CIO bureaucracy clamps down on growing support for Palestine among US workers

Tom Hall
5 November 2023

With opposition growing rapidly to Israeli's genocidal war against the people of Gaza, the trade union bureaucracy in the United States is straining to clamp down on workers and impose the pro-Israeli line of Biden administration and US imperialism.

In a brief, one paragraph statement published October 11, the AFL-CIO trade union federation denounced Hamas for "unspeakable atrocities and carnage" and "terrorism," while saying nothing about the far-greater levels of violence by the Israeli military against Palestinian civilians. As of this writing, the US-backed siege of Gaza has claimed the lives of nearly 10,000 people, including over 4,000 children.

The statement shed crocodile tears about the "humanitarian crisis" in Gaza without naming its source, the Israeli government and the Biden White House, while calling for a "swift resolution" to the "conflict."

The clear meaning of the statement is that the AFL-CIO bureaucracy fully backs the Gazan genocide, which the US is using to provoke a far-wider war across the Middle East and the world to reassert its global hegemony.

American workers, by contrast, are outraged by Israel's massacre of Palestinians and opposed to a new war in the Middle East. This has found reflection in growing support for action to block the transfer of weapons and equipment to Israel. One recent resolution passed by the Thurston-Lewis-Mason Central Labor Council, which covers unions an area to the south of Seattle, Washington, declared it was "opposed in principle" to "any union involvement in the production or transportation of weapons destined for Israel," called on the AFL-CIO to demand "an immediate ceasefire

and equal rights for Palestinians and Israelis" and resolved to investigate "ways our member unions may be participating in this war." The resolution was passed unanimously.

Significantly, the wider region in which the Thurston-Lewis-Mason CLC is located appears to be a significant conduit for weapons to Israel. According to a source who spoke with the WSWs, the military supply vessel *Cape Orlando* docked at the Port of Tacoma over the weekend, after departing the Port of Oakland in northern California on Friday. In Oakland, hundreds of demonstrators attempted to prevent the ship, carrying weapons bound for the Israeli military, from leaving, attracting support from dock workers.

According to *In These Times*, the AFL-CIO intervened to overrule this resolution, and President Liz Shuler sent out a memo to all state federations, area and central labor councils declaring "*only* the national AFL-CIO is authorized to take public positions on national and international issues [emphasis in original.]"

With consummate cynicism, Shuler added that this rule is "meant to protect us from being divided or diluted. And they must be followed." In other words, only the party line set by the AFL-CIO Executive Council is permissible, and no overt opposition will be tolerated.

The "unity" invoked by Shuler is the unity of the trade union bureaucracy against rank-and-file workers. The union bureaucracies which comprise the AFL-CIO function as extensions of the Democratic Party and the State Department. In addition to selling out workers' day-to-day needs in the US for nearly a half-century, the AFL-CIO has a notorious record of collaborating with the CIA in countless US-backed coups from

Guatemala and Iran to Brazil and Chile and continues to operate on behalf of US imperialism to this day.

The top bureaucrats which compose the AFL-CIO's Executive Council include figures such as Shawn Fain (United Auto Workers), Sean O'Brien (International Brotherhood of Teamsters) and Randi Weingarten (American Federation of Teachers) who are in regular communication with the Biden administration to block or limit strikes and enforce "labor peace."

Weingarten has long been a close ally of the Clinton family and is particularly infamous for having promoted for years the neo-Nazi forces allied with NATO in Ukraine through her repeated trips to Eastern Europe. She spent 15 hours a day during the height of the pandemic, according to the *New York Times*, forcing through the reopening of schools over the overwhelming objection of teachers and parents.

Workers have no control over this vast apparatus paid for with their dues money, and top posts are typically "elected" either by acclamation at union conventions or in direct elections marred by fraud. Fain, for example, was "elected" UAW President in a vote that involved only 9 percent of the membership. Will Lehman, a socialist autoworker who ran against Fain on a platform of abolishing the bureaucracy has gone to court to demand the re-run of the election due to massive irregularities.

Such is the level of bureaucratic control that only one member of the AFL-CIO Executive Council, Mark Dimondstein of the American Postal Workers, opposed the October 11 resolution. Dimondstein, who is Jewish, denounced Israeli genocide and Zionism in a 30-minute speech to the Council, exposing as a fraud attempts to slander all opposition to Israel as antisemitic.

In spite of this bureaucratic opposition, support for Palestine continues to grow. An open letter is circulating among UAW members endorsing the call by the Palestinian trade union federation to block shipments of weapons to Israel, and calling "upon workers everywhere, our union leadership, and the UAW International to demand an immediate end to Israel's brutal siege and bombardment of Gaza and all military funding going toward Israel."

Significantly, the resolution goes on to denounce the longstanding support for Zionism by the American unions, writing: "the U.S. labor movement has failed the Palestinian people. For instance, the American

Federation of Labor (AFL) advocated for and helped finance the construction of Zionist settlements, directly contributing to the displacement of Palestinians.

It continues: "It is a moral imperative for us to acknowledge this history and push the labor movement to act on the side of Palestinian liberation. ... workers in the U.S. are struggling against many of the same capitalist forces that maintain and bolster the Israeli occupation of Palestine."

The letter also demands the UAW defend members who are retaliated against for their support of Palestine, and that "the UAW must not overturn democratic decisions made by the rank-and-file, as it did when UAW 2865, UAW 2322, and GSOC-UAW 2110 voted to support BDS [Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions] in solidarity with the Palestinian people in 2014 and 2016, respectively." The letter has about 800 signatures, including a large number of graduate student members of the United Auto Workers.

Will Lehman has issued a statement demanding the UAW stop producing equipment for the Israeli military. "Biden is not standing with workers, he is standing with Netanyahu and the Israeli military as they massacre civilians and bomb hospitals and schools. It is not the Democratic Party or the trade union bureaucrats who will stop imperialist war. War will only be stopped through the independent and unified initiative of the international working class. That is what we must fight for," Lehman said.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact