

UAW's "ceasefire" resolution on Gaza designed to prop up pro-war Democratic Party

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On Friday morning, the United Auto Workers announced it had endorsed a statement calling for a permanent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

The resolution, issued nearly two months after the start of the war, is a response by a faction of the union bureaucracy to the growing popular opposition in the working class to Israel's genocide against the Palestinians, expressed in global protests which have involved tens of millions of people.

It is also responding to pent-up anger with the complicity of the UAW itself. Although there is widespread disgust and opposition among rank-and-file autoworkers to the slaughter of the Palestinians, the UAW had not issued any official statement on the war and has continued to promote pro-war Democrats, including President Biden. UAW Local 600 in Dearborn, Michigan, home to the largest Arab-American community in the US, was forced to cancel an event with Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson in response to potential protests over her support for Israel.

With its resolution, UAW President Shawn Fain and his advisors in the Democratic Socialists of America are trying to shore up the credibility of the UAW bureaucracy and block the opposition of workers and youth to the Biden administration, with which the UAW has the closest ties.

This growing opposition found expression in the wide support for a statement published issued a month ago by socialist autoworker Will Lehman, which called for industrial action to halt the production and shipment of weapons for Israel. Lehman's video went viral and has been viewed more than 1 million times.

A public letter has also been circulating among UAW members calling for a ceasefire and demanding that the UAW not override pro-Palestinian resolutions as it has in the past. In New York City, members of the public defenders' union, which is part of the UAW, are being sued by their employers for proposing a pro-Palestinian union resolution, in a massive assault on democratic rights.

But the UAW's resolution, by contrast, is the most limited and mealy-mouthed statement in favor of a ceasefire which could possibly have been passed. It reads in full:

We, the members of the American labor movement, mourn the loss of life in Israel and Palestine. We express our solidarity with all workers and our common desire for peace in Palestine and Israel, and we call on President Joe Biden and Congress to push for an immediate ceasefire and end to the siege of Gaza. We cannot bomb our way to peace. We also condemn any hate crimes against Muslims, Jews or anyone else.

In issuing this call, U.S. unions are joining the efforts of 13 Congress members and others who are calling for an immediate ceasefire.

The statement does not identify Israel's war as a deliberate campaign of genocide and ethnic cleansing, as Israeli politicians themselves have made clear. Instead, the 75 years of colonial oppression against the Palestinians is subsumed into "mourning the loss of life" in general in both Israel and Palestine, implicitly drawing an equals sign between the two and presenting the conflict as simply a senseless tragedy for which nobody in particular is to blame.

This position was underscored by statements by Fain to the *Detroit News*, which were published on December 1. "We're not picking a side between Israel and Palestine, but we do not want to see innocent people continue to be killed due to acts of terrorist[s]. Deal with the terrorist, and move on," Fain said, providing justification for Israel's ongoing slaughter of the Palestinians in Gaza.

The UAW resolution also not only ignores the ironclad support for Israel's genocide in the White House, it even calls upon the *Biden administration* itself to "push" for a ceasefire. No doubt this call for US imperialism to "pressure" its proxy to stop committing crimes which it itself has sanctioned will fall on deaf ears.

It also does not mention the ferocious campaign of censorship and blacklisting in the other Western countries which dishonestly casts all opposition to genocide as antisemitic. The UAW has not even issued a statement defending the democratic rights of its own members which are under attack.

These attacks are also coming from the union bureaucracy itself. The AFL-CIO Executive Council, of which UAW President Shawn Fain is a member, passed a resolution backing Israel on October 11, with the only opposition coming from American Postal Workers Union President Mark Dimonstein. The AFL-CIO overruled a unanimous ceasefire resolution by a local council in Washington state and then issued instructions to all of its state and local bodies forbidding them from passing resolutions which violate the federation's policy of support for Israel.

Neither Fain nor the UAW have said anything about the AFL-CIO statement or its bureaucratic attempts to silence criticism.

Most importantly, the resolution does not commit the UAW to do anything at all. There is no reference to the Palestinian trade unions' call for international strikes to halt the supply of weapons to Israel, nor does it even call for UAW members to participate in the massive demonstrations against the war.

The only action which the UAW has committed itself to, according to Region 9A Director Brandon Mancilla, is the creation of a "Divestment and Just Transition working group" to "study the history of Israel and Palestine," as though this were unclear, and "our union's economic ties to the conflict."

This working group will not have to look very far to find the UAW's "ties to the conflict." They could start with Fain's appearance on

November 9 with President Biden in Belvidere, Illinois, which took place as thousands demonstrated in Chicago opposing Biden's support for genocide. The two were promoting the UAW's sellout deal with the Big 3 US automakers, in front of a sign instructing workers to get "back to work" following the union's shutdown of a limited strike affecting only a small minority of production.

They could also look at the UAW bureaucracy's role in blocking strikes and ramming through contracts at major defense companies such as General Dynamics and at Allison Transmission, the latter of which produces transmissions for tanks. This ensures the continuous flow of weapons to both US imperialism and the Israeli apartheid regime. General Dynamics produces the Mk-80 bomb, the main armament which the Israel Defense Forces is raining down on Palestinian civilians, at its facility in Garland, Texas. UAW-represented facilities in Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania manufacture artillery and mortar rounds and produce and service the Abrams tank.

It is also significant that the resolution was signed only after the contracts at the US automakers were ratified, by a slim margin in the case of General Motors. To have issued even such a limited statement during the vote would only have served to invite a connection between the endless funding for war abroad and the imposition of cuts on workers at home, jeopardizing the contracts' ratification.

The UAW's decision to endorse this resolution is of a piece with recent statements by Senator Bernie Sanders calling for a "ceasefire." For his entire career, Sanders has been a supporter of Israel and only last month opposed a permanent ceasefire. The "ceasefire" Sanders now calls for means an end to the war entirely on Israel's terms, with the remnants of Gaza governed by the hated Palestinian Authority which already functions as security sub-contractors for Israel in the West Bank.

A decision has apparently been made, at least within a section of the political establishment, that overt and direct support for genocide is not enough, given that the unanimity of all the official institutions has failed to stop the massive popular opposition. A second line of attack is needed, a fake official "anti-war" position within the Democratic Party designed to get out in front of this sentiment in order to make it harmless.

Predictably, the UAW resolution has been hailed by the pseudo-left apologists for the union bureaucracy as a turning point in the latter's stance on the war. *In These Times* described it as an "example yet of a profound shift in the relationship between the labor movement and the movements for a cease-fire and Palestinian rights." A contributing editor at *Left Voice* hailed the decision as a reversal of what he had earlier described as the union's "ongoing silence" on the issue.

It is also significant in this respect that Mancilla, who announced the endorsement, is a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, whose members in Congress have repeatedly voted in favor of military funding for Israel and denounced protests against the genocide. Mancilla himself came out of the Harvard graduate students union, which is part of the UAW, where he helped impose a contract with below-inflation wage increases.

In reality, the vast majority of the union bureaucracy continues its overt support for Israel's genocide. And the bureaucracy has long been integrated with US imperialism, including its support for USAID and other CIA fronts, support for anti-communist unions in Latin America and unstinting defense of Israel. Their foreign policy is joined at the hip with their "domestic" policy, which has been to bolster "American" profits by ramming through one sellout after another for decades. They are also a key component in Biden's plan to secure American supply chains as it prepares to open up new fronts in its war for global domination.

In his speech announcing the UAW's resolution, Mancilla placed the move in continuity with the opposition by former UAW President Walter Reuther to the Vietnam war, as well as the UAW's support for the boycott movement against apartheid South Africa.

Reuther, an early supporter of the Vietnam War, publicly came out against it in 1968 under conditions of mass anti-war, civil rights and trade union struggles, and the conclusion by sections of the Democratic Party that the continuation of the war was only exacerbating the foreign policy and domestic crisis.

In the case of the UAW's campaign against apartheid the 1980s and 1990s, this was part of a broader effort by sections of the union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party to win official US backing for Nelson Mandela's African National Congress, which was put in power in 1994 to prevent a revolutionary settling of accounts with apartheid by the working class.

Ominously, Mancilla also draws an equivalency between support for a ceasefire and the UAW's role in World War II, which he falsely called "opposition to fascism." In reality, the UAW supported not the fight against fascism, but the fight of US imperialism, through its intervention in World War II, for world domination. It did so by enforcing a no-strike pledge during the war, and afterwards, expelling the socialist militants who helped build the UAW during the Great Depression, even before the anticommunist witch hunts organized by Senator Joseph McCarthy

However, it is true that the UAW, just as in World War II, is focused on helping US capitalism secure the "home front" as it barrels towards a new world war. Fain has repeatedly invoked the "Arsenal of Democracy," the marketing term for US wartime military production, a sign of the bureaucracy's eagerness to service the American war machine.

The Gaza resolution does nothing whatsoever to change this orientation. The UAW still supports US imperialism and its Zionist allies, but in a slightly modified form. To put it more directly, its insincere statement of support for a ceasefire is *a part* of the campaign to prepare public opinion for war.

The real fight against imperialism means the struggle for the political independence of the working class, not only from the capitalist parties but their lackeys in the union bureaucracy. A powerful antiwar movement in the working class, including direct actions to prevent the production and transport of weapons for Israel, is inextricably linked to a rebellion against the union apparatus and the transfer of power to the rank and file.



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