

Covering for Biden, Bay Area city governments and dockworkers union local pass resolutions supporting Gaza ceasefire

David Benson, Jonathan Burleigh
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In the past several weeks, the Democratic-controlled city governments of Oakland and Richmond in the San Francisco Bay Area, as well as the region's International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) local passed resolutions opposing Israel's attacks on Gaza. The tepid criticisms raised in these documents are an attempt to demobilize mass opposition to the US-backed Israeli government's genocidal onslaught on the densely-populated Palestinian enclave. These resolutions, which commit to no meaningful action, aim to stoke illusions that the Democratic Party and its accomplices in the trade union bureaucracy can be pushed to the left through mass pressure.

The Oakland City Council resolution, which passed unanimously on November 27, supported a resolution in the United States Congress, sponsored by Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) member Cori Bush, urging President Biden to call for a ceasefire. The City Council resolution also called for unrestricted entry of aid in to the besieged enclave and "respect for international law." The resolution, which blandly references the number killed in Israel and Gaza, simply calls for release of hostages and an end to hostilities.

The Oakland resolution followed a more strongly-worded October 25 resolution by the City Council of Richmond, less than 10 miles north of Oakland. The resolution includes the following phrases: "the City of Richmond calls for an end to Israeli apartheid and the occupation and blockade of Palestinian land by Israeli military forces;" and "the City of Richmond opposes all existing and any future military aid to Israel." The resolution passed 5-1, with Democrat-aligned councilmember Cesar Zepeda opposing the resolution on pro-Zionist grounds.

On November 17, the ILWU Local 10, whose members include workers at the ports of Oakland and San Francisco, passed a resolution expressing solidarity with the October 16 call of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) to refuse to build or transport weapons destined

for Israel.

The ILWU Local 10 resolution declares, "A message to the PGFTU expressing our solidarity and determination to take action in their defense consistent with our actions in the past and the ILWU's principled position of defending Palestinian rights. The UN calls Gaza an 'open air prison' of 2.2 million Palestinians. ... It is no surprise that there would inevitably be a rebellion." The resolution also states, "We additionally call on trade unions both nationally and internationally to support PGFTU, a ceasefire and an end to Israeli apartheid oppression."

The Oakland and Richmond resolutions have predictably enraged corporate media outlets such as *Newsweek*, the *New York Post*, *Jewish Forward*, and *Breitbart*. Richmond City Council members have reported multiple threats of physical violence due to their support for the motion.

The ILWU resolution has garnered effusive praise from *The Nation*, in which Western Illinois University Professor Peter Cole calls Local 10 "the conscience of the labor movement."

However militant their rhetoric, none of these resolutions commits anyone to anything. Each of these resolutions is fundamentally a whitewash of the blood-soaked pro-Israel policies of the Democratic Party and the trade union bureaucracies that support it.

The San Francisco Bay Area resolutions are a more polished expression of a broader shift in posture among significant sections of the trade union apparatus and Democratic Party to regain a measure of influence among masses of workers and young people who are deeply hostile to the genocide.

The Biden administration has repeatedly stated that the flow of US weapons and money into the Israeli war machine is not subject to any "red lines," giving the Netanyahu government the green light to deliberately target hospitals, bakeries, and other lifesaving civilian infrastructure. However, the administration is increasingly presenting itself

as somehow pushing the Netanyahu regime for moderation, with administration officials presenting the short-lived “humanitarian pause” as a product of US government pressure.

The California Democratic Party and its supposed “left” wing are fully implicated in these war crimes. The governor of California, Democrat Gavin Newsom, made clear his support for genocide a week earlier by announcing a trip to Israel, saying, “I’ll be meeting with those impacted by the horrific terrorist attacks and offering California’s support.”

The token character of the ILWU Local 10 resolution is highlighted in the context of the local’s history. In 2022, the ILWU responded rapidly to the NATO-provoked Russian invasion of Ukraine by refusing to handle Russian tankers in West Coast ports, lining up with the Biden administration’s anti-Russian propaganda. In the 1970s and 1980s, ILWU Local 10 launched boycotts of South African ships in protest of the country’s far-right apartheid government. This was aimed at encouraging the US political establishment to back Nelson Mandela’s African National Congress, which was later put in power to prevent South African workers from putting an end to apartheid through revolutionary means.

The resolution makes no such commitment to block any shipments of war materiel to Israel. On November 3rd, anti-genocide protesters and rank-and-file dock workers, with the grudging sanction of the ILWU Local 10 leadership, directly took up the call of the PGFTU and blockaded and successfully delayed ship carrying weapons to Israel at the Port of Oakland. Protesters and workers did the same at the ship’s next port of Tacoma, Washington before the protest was shut down by pro-Democratic Party organizers without explanation, allowing the ship to carry its cargo of weapons to Israel.

In Europe, Barcelona dock workers also took up the call of the PGFTU, announcing that they would refuse to service any ships carrying military supplies to Israel and any other country to protect human rights. A coalition of Belgian airport ground crew unions called on their members to stop handling weapons shipments to Israel.

In other words, the ILWU’s militant-sounding resolution is simply an attempt by the union apparatus to keep militant sections of the working class within the overall union and Democratic Party straitjacket.

Although the ILWU Local 10 resolution calls for other trade unions to pass similar resolutions, their resolution refrains from criticizing the leadership of the AFL-CIO, including the ILWU national leadership, which back the Democratic Party to the hilt.

The AFL-CIO stated on October 11, “There can be no justification for the unspeakable atrocities and carnage carried out by Hamas against Israelis.” Similarly, American

Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, with close connections to the US State Department, lined up behind Israel, stating, “We unequivocally stand with the Israeli people against the heinous and inhuman attack by Hamas against innocent civilians.”

However, in a recent interview with *The Nation*, Weingarten endorsed Biden’s recent lying pose of moderation, saying, “I hope and pray and believe in the push that President Biden is making to say that there’s an understanding that the Israelis have a right to fight this war against Hamas, but one has to minimize casualties of civilians.”

ILWU President Willie Adams has maintained a deafening silence on Gaza. However, the experience of the past year’s contract struggle makes his and the ILWU bureaucracy’s allegiance clear. The ILWU forced 22,000 dockworkers to stay on the job for over a year without a contract, including during a strike of British Columbia ILWU dockworkers. Despite firm sentiment for a strike, the ILWU rammed through a closed-door deal with the Pacific Maritime Association at the request of the Biden administration, with Acting Secretary of Transportation Julie Su brokering the agreement. By passing this contract without a strike, the ILWU ensured the continued flow of war materiel to the US Ukrainian proxy forces, and now continues the flow of weapons to the American imperialism’s Israeli garrison state in the Middle East.

Ultimately, these resolutions aim to create an illusion that it is possible to end the war through pressure on the Democratic Party, without an independent class response, without mass industrial action to force an end to the war and a political struggle against capitalism and its political defenders.

The genocide cannot be stopped by petitioning the Democratic Party and its trade union hirelings. Instead, the mass anti-genocide movement must orient directly to the working class, fighting for the construction of rank-and-file committees, independent of the Democrats, Republicans, and the trade union apparatus, to take up the PGFTU’s call to halt the shipment of arms to Israel and for industrial action to end this genocide. This requires a political struggle based on uniting workers across the world against war and the capitalist profit system and imperialism, which produce it. This is the struggle for world socialism.



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