

2,000 attend Labor for Palestine rally in Oakland, California

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Last Saturday, over 2,000 demonstrators of all ages attended the Labor for Palestine demonstration in Oakland, under the slogan of “Labor demands a permanent cease fire.” Many demonstrators brought homemade signs with slogans such as “Never again is NOW,” “We stand with humanity,” “Ceasefire NOW” and “Free Palestine.”

For two months, hundreds of thousands in the United States have taken part in mass demonstrations against Israel’s genocidal attacks on the people of Gaza, not simply to express their opposition, but to fight for action that will force a halt to war crimes. In the Bay Area, protesters have shut down the Bay Bridge, occupied the federal building in Oakland and most significantly attempted to block a ship with war materiel heading for Israel. Despite the mass opposition to Israel’s genocide, there has been bipartisan support at the state and federal level to continue arming the fascist Netanyahu regime with “no red lines.”

It is no surprise that workers across the region support the call for industrial action by the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) to halt the supply of weapons to Israel. The mobilization of the immense social power of the working class is the only viable and realistic strategy to halt the genocide. There is increasing disgust and anger with the unanimous support of the entire political and media establishment for Israel, even as the death toll has passed 20,000 and hundreds continue to die every day.

But the mobilization of the working class to stop the war requires a rebellion against the trade union apparatus, which totally supports US imperialism and is terrified that a mass movement would undermine the social privileges which they have derived through their integration with corporate management, with whom they collaborate to impose continuous pro-company sellouts.

The militant mood of workers attending Saturday’s demonstration stood in contrast to the official speakers from local unions and the East Bay Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), who sought to channel opposition to Israel’s genocide into pressuring politicians, including praise for ‘Genocide’ Joe Biden himself. The DSA, whose

congresspeople have continuously voted to fund the Israeli and US war machines, and the union bureaucrats are desperately trying to prop up the Democratic Party and prevent a break by workers with the capitalist two-party system.

The real aim and function of the speeches were the same as a press conference last week in Washington involving several DSA members of Congress, United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain and other union officials. That conference took place mere minutes before Democrats voted overwhelmingly with Republicans for a record military spending bill which fast-tracks supplies for Israel.

The posturing in the Bay Area speeches, however, was somewhat more radical-sounding than the event in Washington. Multiple speakers referenced the PGFTU’s statement, but not one speaker called for workers to actually prepare industrial action, much less was prepared to organize it themselves.

Instead, the predominant call was for the passage of ceasefire resolutions in local unions, school boards and other local bodies with the aim of pressuring the Biden administration, which has openly and repeatedly stated that it will place no “red lines” on US support for Israeli military activity in Gaza.

Remarks from a speaker from Local 10 of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union were particularly revealing. Members of this local passed a November 17 resolution in solidarity with Gaza, “expressing our solidarity and determination to take action in their [Gaza’s] defense consistent with our actions in the past.” That resolution was passed after some individual members of Local 10 participated in a November 3 action delaying a ship carrying military cargo to Israel.

But the ILWU, with more than 20,000 members across the US West Coast, has not delayed, let alone halted, a single arms shipment. But when it suits official government policy, the ILWU bureaucracy does not hesitate to act. Following the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine last year following relentless provocations by Washington and

NATO, the ILWU immediately announced it would refuse to handle any cargo from Russian freighters.

The chair of the ILWU Local 10 Young Workers Committee, who introduced the above resolution to the membership, made clear that he and the union were making a conscious decision not to take meaningful action. “We understand the pressure we *could* apply from this position [emphasis added],” he said, but did not explain why they *are not* applying that pressure.

For all its posturing, the ILWU apparatus is committed to the smooth functioning of the US war machine. It kept workers on the job for over a year without a contract after the last West Coast contract expired in the summer of 2022. Behind the scenes, the ILWU was working hand in glove with the Biden administration to prepare a concessions contract. Faced with a growing rebellion from below, as workers across California began organizing job actions to slow or halt port traffic, it finally rammed through the contract earlier this year which was worked out with the key involvement of Biden’s acting Labor Secretary Julie Su.

The Biden administration, which has made a central focus on securing supply chains which are being rendered vulnerable by the wars which the US is fomenting, has made no secret of the fact that it sees labor “peace” on the docks primarily as a “national security” issue. To drive the point home, Biden addressed the media last year from the deck of the USS Iowa, a World War II battleship moored in the Port of Los Angeles, when contract talks with the ILWU first began.

A Vice President of the Oakland Education Association (OEA) presented the OEA as a militant union, falsely claiming that the OEA won victories in the 2018 and 2023 Oakland Unified (OUSD) contract struggles. In reality, the union shut those strikes down, claiming the district did not have the money to meet teacher demands. Like educator unions in many districts, OUSD is carrying out devastating budget cuts and school closures that are rapidly eviscerating public education in the city with the union’s cooperation.

Perhaps most revealing were the remarks of a head steward of UAW Local 2865, representing graduate students and other academic student employees at the University of California. She favorably portrayed the recent intervention of the Biden Administration to force Big 3 autoworkers to accept an austerity contract, under which the auto companies just announced nearly 5,000 layoffs. “Just a few months ago, Joe Biden, who could at any time make the call to end the war and end the occupation, was on our picket lines speaking to our members. He spoke directly with our president, Shawn Fain, taking our lead in resolving contract negotiations with the Big 3 automakers.”

The supposed takeaway from this is that, “If organized

labor is unified in our demand for peace, then we can win peace. If we are unified in a fight against the genocide, then we can end the genocide.” In reality, it proves that the union bureaucracy is in bed with the Biden administration, and that a real fight to mobilize UAW members to stop the genocide requires a struggle against this corporatist alliance. In November, Fain and Biden held a “back to work” rally where the UAW bureaucrats heaped praise on Biden and booed a protester calling for a ceasefire.

The UAW speaker made no mention of the fact that UAW is keeping its members on the job manufacturing weaponry for the Israeli government. In fact, 1,100 General Dynamics workers were set to strike on October 22, after the beginning of the genocide, until the UAW announced a last-minute deal to prevent a strike.

The timidity of these speakers’ remarks stands in sharp contrast with the dire conditions facing the besieged Palestinians. The official death toll stands above 20,000, already nearly 1 percent of Gaza’s population of 2.2 million. The bulk of the civilian infrastructure, particularly the healthcare system, have been reduced to rubble, and Israel is allowing only a trickle of aid to meet residents’ basic needs. As a result, 9 in 10 Gazans now report not eating every day as internally displaced refugees crowd into the shrinking number of habitable structures in the enclave.

Workers across the world have an obligation to come to the immediate aid of the people of Gaza, as a vital step toward the construction of a mass working class anti-war movement.

What is needed is not appeals to the Democrats and their lieutenants in the trade union bureaucracy. Instead, workers must form rank-and-file committees, independent of and in opposition to all capitalist parties and trade union bureaucrats, to directly take up the call of the PGFTU, to take strike action to directly halt the manufacture and transportation of military equipment to Israel and to build toward a political general strike to end US aid for Israel’s genocide.



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