

IYSSE holds rally to mobilize Detroit area Stellantis autoworkers against US-Israeli genocide in Gaza

Our reporters
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at Wayne State University held a rally on Thursday at the Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly factory in suburban Detroit to mobilize autoworkers against the genocide in Gaza. After 10 weeks of global protests involving millions of people against the genocidal onslaught by the Israeli military in Gaza, the central challenge of directing this mass movement toward the working class has become apparent and urgent.

The students and a group of Socialist Equality Party members held “Stop the Genocide in Gaza!” placards, called on autoworkers to organize against the war and distributed about 500 copies of the statement “The working class must stop the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza” by Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman, a socialist candidate for UAW president.

Appeals to the US and European governments to stop arming and giving political support to the administration of fascist Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have only been met by hostility from the ruling class, including the persecution of students and faculty at campuses, censorship online and police repression. This has emboldened the Israeli regime to intensify its bombing and starvation campaign against the more than 2 million Palestinians in Gaza.

In contrast to those forces orienting toward pressuring the capitalist politicians, the SEP and IYSSE stress that it is only the intervention of the working class that can halt the Gaza genocide.

IYSSE campaigners received an enthusiastic response to their appeal, with many workers willing to donate, sign up for updates and stop during the afternoon shift change to engage in discussions.

A worker, who readily agreed to give a video statement, said: “Israel should stop the genocide, I really do [think that]. I think they should try to figure out how both parties can come to a peaceful resolution... If we [autoworkers] can do anything to help, I think that everybody should. Because I think that this is a fight for everybody, not just for one group of people. Everybody should be doing their part to stop the violence over there.”

In making the latter points, she was referring to the call

highlighted in Will Lehman’s statement, “Stop the production and shipment of arms and equipment for the Israeli military!” All workers affected, the appeal adds, must be paid their salaries in full by the corporations profiting from the war crimes.

The widespread support among the rank-and-file UAW members at Warren Truck for this appeal exposes the complicity in these war crimes of the UAW apparatus and its president, Shawn Fain, who has confined his response to cynical appeals “urging” Congress and the Biden administration to call for a ceasefire.

As explained by Lehman’s statement, Fain has blocked strikes at General Dynamics and Allison Transmission, which supply military equipment being shipped to Israel and Ukraine. Moreover, only a few weeks after it rammed through sellout contracts to autoworkers at the Big Three that supposedly guaranteed job security, the UAW bureaucracy is now sitting on its hands as the corporations carry out thousands of layoffs.

The fight against layoffs and other attacks by corporations must be combined with the struggle against war, but this can only be done in opposition to the pro-imperialist UAW apparatus through the building and expansion of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

Many workers have seen the images of the carnage in Gaza and have been following the news. As one worker was hurrying into the plant, for instance, he yelled: “20k dead. It is disgusting. They are war criminals!”

Another said, “it is horrible, and those bombs could be used against us next.”

Several other workers shouted, “Free Palestine!”

At the same time, a significant number said they knew very little but were eager to learn more, highlighting the importance of the efforts by the IYSSE and WSWs to break through the blackout in the corporate media and censorship on social media. After taking Lehman’s statement, one worker said she was surprised by the scale of deaths. “That is terrible! We shouldn’t be supporting the killing of so many innocent people. I will definitely read this carefully.”

Aaron, another autoworker, called for redirecting resources to

meeting the social needs of workers. “Funding genocide is a very bad thing—I would 100 percent be against that,” he said. “We find money for war so there is money somewhere. They are figuring it out when it’s time to kick people off of their ancestral land, we find money for that, so we can find money to fund schools.”

Asked about the production of weapons used by Israel in American factories and the call for workers to stop their production and delivery, he responded, “Yes, I think there are many ways we can address that problem. I’m not well versed on it right now but I definitely believe that we can figure out something. There is a better way than what is happening over there in Palestine right now.”

The IYSSE rally demonstrated the sharp difference in political and internationalist orientation to the working class by the Trotskyist movement with that of numerous pseudo-left tendencies at university campuses who insist on appealing to the Democratic Party and the trade union bureaucracy.

Such “leftism” on campuses, which employs identity politics and nostrums denouncing workers as politically reactionary, has become exposed as an effort to cordon off students radicalized by the imperialist barbarism in the war from the working class.

This was also a critical political experience for the student youth who participated. Marlene, a student at Wayne State, explained:

I came to the rally first and foremost to attempt to stop the ineffably violent war crimes against the Palestinian people. Their humanity is not up for debate; their lives matter equally as much as any American. Under a capitalist system, more and more people will continue to meet with violent ends for the sole purpose of stuffing the pockets of people who are already wealthy beyond our wildest dreams.

There’s more I could say, like how the American people are suffering too because the genocide is being funded by our money while our basic needs such as education and healthcare are getting cut, but caring about people other than you should be motivation enough. Even when people do care, they think the solution is to “vote for the lesser of two evils,” but we can do better than that. The only way to achieve peace and equality is for the working class to take control by striking.

A fellow IYSSE member stressed the need for sustaining and expanding an orientation to build the movement against war in the working class. “I think if this type of work continues, lots of change can be made within a much shorter time than most expect,” he said, and added:

The working class has more power than it thinks, they just need to be become aware of it. Speaking to that, during the rally we ended up handing out hundreds of leaflets along with speaking with those with more time. I hope that this type of work continues along with more joining in, not only from workers but students as well as we are always stronger together.

Todd, another student at Wayne State, said:

Participating in the IYSSE intervention at the autoworkers plant was an enlightening experience, allowing me to directly engage with workers and discuss the shared struggles between college students and factory workers within the capitalist and imperialist system.

As a college student deeply committed to learning and passionate about creating a better future, observing the dire situation in Gaza has evoked a profound sense of despair and outrage within me. Being on the ground and conversing with factory workers helped me see the shared challenges we face under an unjust system and highlighted the interconnectedness between war and our daily economic and social realities.

The discussions about halting the ongoing atrocities in Gaza, ceasing arms production and understanding the wider implications of these issues gave me hope that together we can truly effect positive change and make the world a better place for everyone. I am committed to carrying forward this message and continuing to build bridges between students and the working class, striving for a fundamental revolution in our society.



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