

American Medical Association sends police against healthcare workers calling for Gaza ceasefire

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On December 18, healthcare workers held a rally at the Chicago headquarters of the American Medical Association (AMA) to urge the organization to demand an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza.

Rather than responding to the workers' appeal, the AMA sent security guards to forcibly remove the workers from the building. The incident sheds light on the support of the AMA for US imperialism and contains lessons for healthcare workers who seek to end the Netanyahu government's campaign of genocide against the Palestinians.

Like workers in other industries, healthcare workers are outraged by Israel's ongoing and systematic murder of medical personnel and deliberate destruction of hospitals in Gaza. For months, healthcare workers in the United States have been calling and sending emails to the AMA, urging the organization to defend its Hippocratic Oath and for the association to denounce these crimes publicly.

At the December 18 rally, workers brought a physical copy of their demands, which they planned to deliver personally to AMA representatives.

Even before the rally began, policemen and security guards arrived at the building and positioned themselves on its perimeter as the workers approached. As speakers addressed the rally and led the workers in chants, AMA security guards took pictures of the workers without asking for their consent. The guards also asked journalists who were covering the rally to leave the area.

Two doctors went into AMA headquarters carrying a packet that included their demands, various letters and other informational documents. AMA security guards quickly stopped them and asked for the packet. After

glancing at the first page of the packet, the guards asked the doctors to leave the building. When the doctors asked the reason for this request, the guards told them that they were "unwanted guests." The guards then tried to push one of the doctors toward the door.

The doctors stood their ground and called the AMA office, asking for the guards to be called off and for the opportunity to deliver their packet. A representative of the AMA refused both requests, and local police were soon called to help eject the doctors from the building. These repressive tactics prevented the workers from delivering their demands.

This Chicago rally is only the latest demonstration of the AMA's opposition to a ceasefire in Gaza. At a meeting of the AMA House of Delegates (the organization's legislative body) in November, representatives of the AMA's Minorities Affairs Group introduced a draft resolution calling for "a ceasefire in Israel and Palestine in order to protect civilian lives and healthcare personnel."

A delegate from the Resident and Fellow Section spoke in favor of the resolution, but was told by Dr. Andrew Gurman, a former AMA president, that the resolution dealt with "geopolitical issues" and thus was not within "the purview of this House." When others tried to speak in support of the resolution, they were interrupted, and further discussion of the resolution was abruptly ended.

The AMA's sudden intolerance of statements on "geopolitical issues" is the sheerest hypocrisy. The AMA had no scruples about making a public statement supporting the US proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. "The AMA is outraged by the senseless injury and

death the Russian army has inflicted on the Ukrainian people,” AMA President Dr. Gerald E. Harmon thundered in March 2022. “We join physicians everywhere—and especially in Ukraine—who are calling for an end to this war so we can work on healing the terrible damage already inflicted.” He faithfully echoed the official US State Department line that the Russian invasion of Ukraine had been unprovoked.

The common thread linking the AMA’s remarks on Ukraine with its refusal to call for a ceasefire in Gaza is that both positions uphold the interests of US imperialism and larger war plans by Washington and NATO allies to pursue a global war aimed ultimately at China.

It should come as no surprise that top leaders of the AMA have connections with the state and the military. Harmon, for example, served in the military for 35 years and retired as a major general of the Air National Guard. Dr. Jesse Ehrenfeld, the current AMA president, is a former lieutenant in the Naval Reserve and served a tour in Afghanistan beginning in 2014. His medical research has been supported by the US Department of Defense.

The AMA has long supported capitalism and profit-driven healthcare since its inception. In the 1940s, it opposed President Harry Truman’s proposed healthcare reforms, which would have created a national health insurance plan and expanded healthcare facilities in low-income communities, on the grounds that they constituted “socialized medicine.”

In the 1950s and 1960s, the AMA campaigned vigorously against the introduction of Medicare. It helped defeat the healthcare reform proposed by President Bill Clinton in the 1990s. Today it opposes the proposed Medicare for All, which has been proposed by some Democrats such as Bernie Sanders in order to bolster the party’s “progressive” credentials, but which they well know has no chance of passing against opposition from Republicans and right-wing Democrats. This defense of the profit system is the root of the AMA’s social and political positions.

The US-supported genocide in Gaza and the proxy war between NATO and Russia in Ukraine are two facets of an emerging imperialist redivision of the world. The corporate and financial oligarchy of the US seeks to reverse its protracted economic decline through military means. The aim of the current

conflicts is to seize control of new territory, resources, labor and markets by force. Preparations to expand the conflicts to Iran and China, which is the main economic and geopolitical rival of US imperialism, are already being carried out. These bipartisan policies are the result not of madness or misconceptions, but of objective economic processes.

To end the slaughter of healthcare workers and other innocent Palestinians in Gaza, healthcare workers—and all workers—must establish their political independence from the ruling class. New organizations of struggle are needed: rank-and-file committees that workers themselves control democratically. Accomplishing this task requires that workers break with both capitalist political parties and their junior partners in the trade unions and professional organizations.

The establishment of rank-and-file committees will enable workers to communicate across borders and coordinate direct action to end the genocide. Only through rank-and-file committees can healthcare workers express and defend their interests, which include the right to live and practice in a world free from war, and capitalist exploitation which places profit before human life throughout the entire healthcare system. The fight against imperialist war is inseparable from the fight to replace the capitalist system with socialism, which is the only means by which high-quality healthcare can be provided to all as a human right.



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