

AFL-CIO issues pro-war “ceasefire” resolution on Gaza

Tom Hall
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On Thursday, the AFL-CIO issued a terse, one-sentence statement on Gaza. It reads in full:

The AFL-CIO condemns the attacks by Hamas on October 7th and calls for a negotiated cease-fire in Gaza—including the immediate release of all hostages and provision of desperately needed shelter, food, medicine and other humanitarian assistance to Gazans—and reaffirms our support of a two-state solution for long-term peace and security.

This statement has generally been presented by pseudo-left and liberal outlets, such as the radio show *Democracy Now!* and the Democratic Socialists of America, as indicating the American union federation’s support for a ceasefire and end to the Israeli genocide in Gaza. “For months, rank and file workers across the US have organized their unions to demand permanent ceasefire in Gaza,” a post from the DSA’s official Twitter/X account declared. “That message has now filtered up to the AFL-CIO, representing 13 million workers. Workers will keep raising expectations for internationalism & justice in Palestine!”

To be blunt, among those who have actually read the statement, this claim will fool only those who want to be fooled, or are trying to fool others. Notwithstanding the passing reference to a “ceasefire,” this is a *pro-war* resolution. It is virtually identical in both substance and form to countless statements made by the White House claiming to support a “humanitarian pause” which are meant to screen the Biden administration’s active support for the genocide.

It is also nearly identical to an earlier statement released by the AFL-CIO in October, after its Executive Council explicitly rejected calls for a ceasefire and as it was suppressing pro-ceasefire resolutions by local union bodies. Both statements begin by explicitly denouncing Hamas without even naming Israel, effectively blaming the Palestinians as the aggressors. The words “genocide,” “mass

murder” and “ethnic cleansing” do not appear. Both refer to a “humanitarian crisis” without indicating that this crisis was deliberately created by the Israeli military’s policy of mass starvation and its targeting of civilians and humanitarian aid workers.

The “ceasefire” which the statement calls for would be entirely on Israel’s terms. One could even conclude, on the basis of the most recent statement, that the AFL-CIO is blaming Hamas for the “humanitarian crisis,” and placing the onus on them to release the hostages before Israel makes things worse for Gaza.

As for the reference to a “two-state solution,” this ignores the fact that Israel has made clear that its “solution” is the extermination and expulsion of Gaza’s pre-war population of 2.2 million people. Sections of the American political establishment have raised a “two-state solution” as an alternative endgame to the war. In reality this would mean the total colonial subjugation of the survivors of Gaza through an Israeli-imposed government administered by the Palestinian Authority, hated in the West Bank for its collaboration with Israeli security services.

The American trade union bureaucracy has released this statement *in defense* of the genocide, not in opposition to it. It was issued in advance of the main Israeli assault on the southern city of Rafah, where more than 1 million Palestinians have been herded by Israel with nowhere else to run. This attack, which the AFL-CIO does not even mention, will portend massacres on an even larger scale, even though the Israeli assault is already the bloodiest war, in terms of the rate of civilian deaths, of the 21st century.

The trade union bureaucracy functions as an extension of the American imperialist state. It has long supported the CIA’s regime change operations in Latin America and around the world. It also has supported the state of Israel since its founding in 1948 on the basis of ethnic cleansing.

The AFL-CIO’s support of the Israeli apartheid state continues to the present day, including through the recent visit of teachers union president Randi Weingarten to Israel. Weingarten has also criss-crossed eastern Europe for years,

meeting with the extreme right-wing and antisemitic forces with whom the US is allied in its proxy war against Russia in Ukraine.

It is worth comparing the two brief press releases by the AFL-CIO on Gaza to its endless statements denouncing governments targeted for regime change by the US.

In March 2022, the AFL-CIO released the first of many statements denouncing Russia, “End the Violent Invasion of Ukraine.” That statement declared that the invasion “flagrantly violates international law and undermines the right of Ukraine and of all nations to self-determination free from the threat of violence. The consequences of the attack on Ukraine are vast—tens of thousands of lives may be lost, millions may be displaced. Countries will need to house, feed and support the many refugees fleeing the violence.”

It goes without saying that the AFL-CIO has never made similar statements of concern for the human and national rights of the Palestinians.

While it now ignores the Palestinian trade unions’ call for industrial action to halt the flow of weapons into Israel, the AFL-CIO declared then, “We join the global labor movement [in reality, the pro-imperialist labor bureaucracies of Europe] and our allies in calling for an immediate end to President Vladimir Putin’s military aggression and we support extensive economic sanctions.” It added that the AFL-CIO would place itself at the disposal of the US proxy war, declaring, “We stand ready to assist the Biden administration in its efforts to implement and strengthen these measures.”

The AFL-CIO has also released countless statements denouncing the “cultural genocide” of the Uighurs by the government of China. Unlike the real genocide unfolding in Palestine, China has been accused of genocidal action by the United States, without any credible evidence, to justify trade war and eventual military conflict. But in a statement from June 2020 The AFL-CIO claimed China was engaging in the “largest internment program of an ethnic and religious group since the Holocaust.”

“China [but not Israel!] has a long record of documented worker and human rights violations,” the statement declared. “But even in this horrendous context, the extreme gravity, scale and scope of this program to consolidate state power and enrich companies through a model that rests on massive human rights violations stands out.” The statement called for “U.S. trade action and legislation to end these abuses,” as well as a change to “corporate purchasing practices in global supply chains” to circumvent China.

The trade unions also have no qualms with backing human rights violations within the United States itself. As the Biden administration moved to adopt wholesale the Republican right’s anti-immigrant policies in exchange for funding for

Israel and Ukraine, the AFL-CIO issued a statement praising the Department of Homeland Security’s supposed “efforts to ensure that immigrant workers who take action to help enforce our labor laws will be protected from retaliation.”

The union bureaucracy’s longstanding support for imperialism, as well as its virulent nationalism and anticommunism, arise from its social interests. The pro-corporate union apparatus is hostile to the working class and totally dependent both politically and financially on its ties to the capitalist state.

The trade union bureaucracies objectively support war at the same time as they are helping carry out massive job cuts. Huge layoffs this year at UPS and in the auto industry were made possible by sellout contracts reached in 2023 by the Teamsters and United Auto Workers. The bureaucrats have been working closely with the Biden administration, the so-called “most pro-labor president in US history,” to sabotage strikes and limit wage growth.

The primary role of these social interests in determining the policy of the unions cannot be altered even by the most radical-sounding statement. Even if, at some point in the future, the AFL-CIO were to issue a statement describing Israel’s actions as genocide, this would only be aimed at getting out in front of rank-and-file opposition before it begins to escape their control.

Thus, the UAW executive board adopted a cynical and insincere pro-ceasefire resolution late last year. Its posturing collapsed within weeks, when the UAW endorsed “Genocide Joe Biden” and threw out antiwar protesters at his speech accepting the union’s endorsement. Later, behind a phalanx of riot cops, UAW President Shawn Fain met with Biden in Detroit, where he declared he would send the UAW membership “to war” for him.

A genuine fight against the genocide in Gaza has to be based on the independent mobilization of the working class, in a rebellion against the pro-corporate trade union apparatus. The establishment of rank-and-file committees, controlled by the workers themselves, is necessary to organize industrial action, including strikes and other forms of protests, to stop the genocide in Gaza.

At the same time, the fight against war must be connected with the fight against its source: the capitalist profit system, on the basis of the principles of socialist internationalism. The bureaucracy, meanwhile, directs all of its efforts to defending capitalism from the danger from below.



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