

Indian port workers refuse to handle arms shipments to Israel

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The Water Transport Workers Federation of India (WTWFI), representing 3,500 workers at 11 major Indian ports, has declared that it will refuse to load or unload weapons bound for Israel on any ship. The announcement is a sign of the depth of opposition among Indian workers to Israel's massacring of tens of thousands of defenceless Palestinians with US-supplied weapons and Washington's full-throated political support.

Workers and youth around the world, horrified at Israel's genocidal war in Gaza, have been protesting in their millions demanding an end to the wanton slaughter being perpetrated by the Israel Defence Forces and the fascist regime headed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The death toll in Gaza has officially surpassed 30,000 men, women and children, and it rises to more than 37,000 if the missing are included. Hospitals, schools and other key infrastructure have been destroyed.

The Israeli military has blocked essential supplies of food, water, fuel, medical care and electricity, resulting in widespread starvation, disease and further deaths. Now it is preparing a murderous ground offensive into Rafah, the southernmost city in Gaza where 1.5 million Palestinians are living in the most atrocious conditions.

Opposition among Indian workers and rural toilers to the genocide is widespread. The WTWFI therefore felt compelled to declare its refusal to handle arms shipments destined for Israel. However, the WTWFI, which is affiliated to the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist)-controlled Center of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), did so in hopes of retaining credibility among workers, rather than with the aim of organising any genuine mass worker mobilisation against the genocide. The Stalinist union leaders have done nothing to educate workers about Israel's imperialist-backed genocide against the Palestinians and India's complicity in it, and are offering them no perspective as to how they can oppose it.

When *World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke to some dockworkers at Chennai Port, which is the second largest container port in India, the workers expressed support

for the ban on Israeli war materiel. However, they said that the CITU and the other port unions had conducted no campaign to inform them about the Gaza genocide or the plans to block Israeli war shipments. The discussions also revealed that the WTWFI has made no effort to defend contract workers, who compose the majority of the workforce, or draw them into a campaign to defend the Palestinians of Gaza. This reveals that for the Stalinist leaders of the WTWFI, the call to block Israeli war shipments is a protest gesture, if not a publicity stunt.

The president of the port workers union, Nagendra Rao, said that there had not yet been any reports of ships carrying arms to Israel. However, reports have emerged over recent days of the sale of over 20 Hermes 900 medium-altitude long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) to Israel from India.

The Hermes 900, which is one of four "killer drones" used by Israel, is manufactured at a facility owned by Adani-Elbit Advanced Systems India Limited in the southern Indian city of Hyderabad. The company is a joint venture between Israeli weapons manufacturer Elbit Systems and the Indian Adani Group, a conglomerate owned by Gautam Adani, India's second-wealthiest billionaire and a close confidant of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The sale was first reported by Shephard Media on February 2. While neither India nor Israel have acknowledged the purchase, the sale was confirmed off the record to *The Wire* by sources at the Adani Group.

The Adani-Elbit manufacturing venture is part of an ever-expanding military-security partnership between India and Israel. India has become the largest purchaser of Israeli-made weapons, spending approximately \$1 billion per year.

During the first term in office of Modi and his Hindu-supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) between 2014 and 2019, weapons supplies from Israel to India shot up by 175 percent, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

In 2017, Israel Weapons Industries joined with Punj Lloyd, an Indian engineering and construction firm, to establish

India's first private sector small arms factory in Malanpur in Madhya Pradesh. The plant produces a range of assault weapons, such as Uzi submachine guns, for the Indian military, including its Special Forces. Later that same year Kalyani Rafael Advanced Systems Ltd, another Israeli-Indian joint venture, opened India's first private sector missile plant, manufacturing Spike anti-tank guided missiles for the Indian army.

Modi was among the first world leaders to express solidarity with the far-right Netanyahu regime with a denunciation of the Palestinian uprising on October 7. The New Delhi government, under the pretext of fighting Somali pirates, later deployed two frontline warships in the Gulf of Aden and at least 10 warships to the Arabian Sea amidst the Israeli genocide and the US-instigated broader conflict throughout the Middle East.

Modi's open support for Israel's genocidal war flows from India's close military-strategic partnership with Israel, which he has worked assiduously to expand. However, of even greater significance in determining India's staunch support for the Israeli war on the Palestinians is New Delhi's "Global Strategic Partnership" with American imperialism, which views Israel as its main attack dog in the region. Continuing on the course charted by its Congress Party-led predecessor, the Modi government has transformed India into a frontline state in Washington's drive to strategically encircle and prepare for war with China.

The WTWFI's refusal to mobilise workers in struggle against the genocide in Gaza is inseparable from the Stalinist politics of the CPM to which it is affiliated. In November, the CPM and the CPM-led Left Front were compelled to call some protests against Israel's onslaught on Gaza amid mass opposition within the working class. However, they imposed on the protests the bankrupt perspective of pressuring the Modi government into distancing itself from Israel and its genocidal assault on Gaza, and of working through the UN and great-power diplomacy to secure "peace" in the Middle East via a "two-state solution" to the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Subsequently, the CPM dropped its Gaza protest campaign, so as to ensure that it did not in any way cut across its central political objective: corralling the mass working class opposition to Modi and the BJP behind the INDIA alliance in this spring's general (Lok Sabha) election. Led by the Congress Party, till recently the Indian bourgeoisie's preferred party of government, the INDIA alliance, no less than the BJP, staunchly supports the Indo-US alliance and further "pro-investor" reforms. Its constituent parties also have a long history of adapting to and conniving with Modi's far-right *Hindutva* (Hindu nationalist) allies.

The CPM has acted for decades as the "left" flank of the Indian ruling establishment. This includes seeking to confine opposition among workers and youth to the suppression, dispossession and now slaughter of the impoverished Palestinians within the reactionary framework of capitalist politics and great-power diplomacy. While CITU and CPM leaders on occasion chant slogans against US imperialism, they have done nothing to alert the working class as to the grave danger the Indo-US military-security alliance represents for the people of South Asia and the world—let alone sought to build a global working class-led anti-war movement in opposition to war and the imperialist world order.

In opposition to the Indian Stalinists' pathetic and reactionary appeals to the imperialists and the Indian bourgeoisie to stop the genocide in Gaza, in which they are all implicated, the *World Socialist Web Site* insists that this can only be achieved through the mobilization of the international working class.

Indian workers, as part of the international working class, should organize strikes and other actions to stop the supply and production of all conceivable military equipment destined for Israel. This must be linked to the fight for an international political general strike, and the struggle to fuse the fight against imperialist war with the growing mass upsurge of working people around the world against capitalist austerity and the assault on their social and democratic rights.

The struggle against the US-backed Israeli onslaught is necessarily international in scope. To wage it, workers' struggles cannot remain confined within the suffocating national framework of the union bureaucracies. Workers must build rank-and-file committees affiliated to the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to coordinate opposition against war, capitalist reaction and police-state rule, and unify their struggles into an international movement against capitalism and imperialist war and for socialism.



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