

The Democratic Socialists of America’s “Labor for an Arms Embargo” campaign: A cover for the Democratic Party

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On May 10, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) hosted a panel featuring a group of union officials and Democratic Party operatives to announce a campaign titled “Labor for an Arms Embargo.”

The panelists presented the initiative as an effort to stop the ongoing genocide of Palestinians. In reality, it is a political trap aimed at defusing growing opposition among workers and youth—especially in the United States—to Israel’s onslaught and the Democratic Party’s central role in arming and funding the mass killing.

A central question must be asked of the new “Labor for an Arms Embargo” campaign: Why now? Why has the DSA waited more than a year and a half into the genocide to call for “labor action”? The answer is not a sudden awakening among these bureaucrats, but a tactical maneuver in response to a growing political crisis—above all, the deepening crisis confronting the Democratic Party and the pro-imperialist union apparatus.

Notably absent from the meeting was the DSA’s most prominent member, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Nor did it feature Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, who the DSA has promoted. On his misnamed “Fighting Oligarchy” tour, Sanders has repeatedly defended Israel’s “right to defend itself” and has had police forcefully eject anti-genocide protesters from his rallies.

The DSA-hosted panel featured union officials Rafael Jaime (UAW Local 4811), Sean Embley (UFCW 3000) and Fritz Edler (Railroad Workers United), alongside Democratic Party-affiliated operatives such as Margo Feinberg, a lawyer with Neighbor to Neighbor who represents the UAW and UAW 4811.

In her remarks, Feinberg said that the campaign would seek to emulate efforts from the 1980s to “put pressure on Congress people who were voting the wrong way,” citing

campaigns around Contra aid and El Salvador. She pointed to letter-writing drives and the targeting of specific congressional races as a model for how to “make a difference in the vote.”

Promoting the illusion that genocide can be ended by electing the “right” Democrats, Feinberg cited her group’s role in running Nancy Pelosi’s first congressional campaign. She absurdly described the lifelong imperialist operative as “the champion of fighting for the people of Central America.” Feinberg concluded, “there is somebody out there who can be your champion, and then you can move all of the others.”

In line with this bankrupt electoral strategy, Embley boasted that UFCW 3000 had called for an “uncommitted” vote in the Democratic primaries—not to oppose the party, but to pressure Biden for a “better” foreign policy. He added that “Biden helped unions more than Trump ever did,” providing political cover for the Democratic Party despite its central role in the genocide. Tellingly, this was the first and only mention of Biden and explicit mention of the Democratic Party during the entire meeting, and it came near the very end.

The “uncommitted” campaign was designed at diverting mass opposition to Biden into safe channels. Predictably, it had no impact on halting the slaughter in Gaza. Instead, it served as a campaign slush fund for Democratic Party candidates, helping to shore up support for the very party directing the genocide.

Rafael Jaime, president of UAW Local 4811, representing 48,000 University of California academic workers, offered vague references to “one-on-one organizing” and lauded the union leadership’s role in the 2022 and 2024 strikes.

In reality, the 2022 strike ended in betrayal: union officials quickly compromised on key demands, brought

in Democratic Party “mediators” to enforce a sellout, and left many workers still earning poverty wages without cost-of-living adjustments. Behind closed doors, the bureaucrats agreed to a “no strike” clause that sabotaged future struggles.

The 2024 strike, launched on May 20, 2024 in response to the violent crackdown on Gaza solidarity protests, was similarly undermined by the union’s leadership through the fraudulent “stand-up” strategy that greatly limited participation and isolated the struggle. In response to a UC Regents lawsuit citing a “no-strike clause,” a court issued a temporary restraining order to cease all strike activities on June 7, 2024.

The leadership of UAW Local 4811 quickly complied, having already worked to limit the strike’s impact as much as possible. In the end, the union bureaucracy collaborated openly with the police to suppress genuine opposition to genocide among students and workers.

Absent from Jaime’s comments was any reference to UAW President Shawn Fain’s role in backing the genocide, including the endorsement of Biden under the banner of the UAW’s transformation into an “Arsenal of Democracy.” When Biden accepted the UAW’s endorsement in January, anti-genocide protesters were physically ejected from the event by union officials. Since then, Fain has publicly embraced Trump’s economic nationalism, backing his sweeping tariffs, which are aimed at preparing for war and have already triggered mass layoffs across the auto industry.

Will Lehman, a rank-and-file worker at Mack Trucks who ran for UAW president on a socialist platform, has called since November 2023 for the UAW to end all military production for Israel. The DSA opposed Lehman’s call for building politically independent rank-and-file power. They are now promoting the fraudulent “Labor for an Arms Embargo” campaign more than a year and a half into the genocide.

The utterly bankrupt character of the DSA’s “Labor for an Arms Embargo” campaign stands in stark contrast to the depth of the ongoing genocide and the mass opposition it has provoked.

Since October 7, 2023, the Israeli genocide in Gaza has killed more than 52,000 people, according to official figures, 70 percent of whom are women and children. Tens of thousands more remain buried under rubble or died without ever reaching a hospital. When indirect deaths are included, the real death toll is likely well over 200,000.

Anger is mounting among youth and workers as they

witness these atrocities, even as the political crisis of US imperialism intensifies, marked by military escalations around the world. The Biden administration supported the genocide from the beginning, while the Trump administration has overseen the forced starvation of Gaza for the past two months.

According to the World Health Organization, the entire population of Gaza—2.1 million people—is facing extreme food scarcity, with nearly 500,000 enduring catastrophic hunger. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) estimates that nearly 93 percent of the population is experiencing crisis-level or worse conditions.

There is massive opposition to these crimes, accompanied by escalating attacks on students’ democratic right to protest. Last month, more than 1 million people across the United States took part in demonstrations against the Trump administration’s escalating drive toward dictatorship, including protests opposing the Gaza genocide.

While these protests are a powerful expression of mass anger, over 19 months of slaughter have shown that appeals to those responsible for the genocide will not stop it. To end war and repression, students must unite with the working class to build an independent socialist movement, free from the Democratic Party and the pro-corporate union bureaucracy.

The DSA, a faction of the Democratic Party, is advancing precisely the opposite perspective. It aims to corral workers and students searching for effective ways to fight genocide back into the dead end of the political establishment.



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