

Chris Smalls, founder of US-based Amazon Labor Union, kidnapped and beaten by Israeli military during aid voyage to Gaza

Tom Hall
31 July 2025

Chris Smalls, the founder of the Amazon Labor Union in the United States, was among those kidnapped by the Israel Defense Forces last Saturday while attempting to reach Gaza by sea with humanitarian supplies.

According to the Freedom Flotilla Coalition, which organized the voyage, 21 civilians were abducted aboard the *Handala*, the vessel traveling to Gaza. Smalls was “physically assaulted by seven uniformed individuals,” a statement from the group said. “They choked him and kicked him in the legs, leaving visible signs of violence on his neck and back.”

Smalls appears to have been deliberately singled out. “When his lawyer met with him, Christian was surrounded by six members of Israel’s special police unit. This level of force was not used against other abducted activists.”

Among the other activists detained are 70 year-old grandmother Vigdis Bjorvand, of Norway, who was held in solitary confinement before being expelled from Israel on Wednesday.

On Thursday, Smalls and Hatem Aouini of Tunisia, the last two crew members still imprisoned, were finally released. They had been on hunger strike for more than five days to protest their violent treatment by the Israeli government.

This is the third time this year that Israel has attacked a vessel from the Freedom Flotilla. In June, the Israeli navy seized the *Madleen*, whose crew included well-known climate activist Greta Thunberg, in international waters, a brazen act of piracy. In May, drone-launched missiles were used to attack the *Conscience* in international waters just outside the Mediterranean island country of Malta.

World Socialist Web Site denounces the latest criminal assault by Israel. We call on the workers of the United States and the world to organize actions to halt the flow of weapons into Israel being used to commit genocide in the Gaza Strip.

Responsibility rests not only with the fascistic Netanyahu government in Israel, but the entire political establishment in the United States and in Europe. In America, both parties have spent the last two years brutally attacking mass demonstrations against the genocide; in Europe, governments are taking steps to illegalize even speaking in support of pro-Palestinian organizations. The cynical pretext for this is the false equation of opposition to the genocide and to Zionism with antisemitism, an insult to the memory of the 6 million Jews who perished in the Holocaust.

The arrest and beating of Smalls shows that the war on Gaza is part of a wider war on the working class. Eruptions of military violence abroad are connected with the industrial slaughterhouse in American factories and the attacks on immigrants and democratic rights more broadly. Recent horrific deaths include explosions at a fuel pellet plant in Nebraska and a fireworks factory in California, the death in a meat grinder of a 19-year-old food production worker and Guatemalan immigrant, and the death of autoworker Ronald Adams.

No doubt, the Israeli government meted out particular brutality against Smalls because they associate him with opposition to genocide from the international working class, which terrifies them above all else.

Smalls founded the Amazon Labor Union after he was fired in March 2020 from the company’s JFK8 warehouse in Staten Island for organizing a strike

against the operation of the facility during the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

In April 2022, workers at the facility became the first in the US to join a union at Amazon. Workers did so because they wanted to organize broad rank-and-file actions against the massive transnational corporations. The militant workforce at the warehouse has organized walkouts repeatedly over horrible conditions, including a fire in 2022 and the death of a worker in the warehouse's loading dock earlier this year.

Although Smalls is no longer with ALU, the union's executive committee issued a statement demanding "the immediate and unconditional release of all detained activists ... and we call on the broader labor movement to take a stance for Palestinian liberation."

Before departing to join the Freedom Flotilla, Smalls issued a statement "calling out the AFL-CIO and the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) directly. These organizations have yet to pass a single resolution demanding a ceasefire. Worse, they continue to facilitate the shipping of arms to Israel, despite the blood on those shipments. Union members across the country are rising in protest, while your so-called 'leaders' remain silent. That silence equals death."

Indeed, the union bureaucrats have lined up to offer their support for war, with many explicitly backing Trump's "America First" policies. The ILA has called Trump the "greatest friend" of workers and endorsed his illegal airstrikes on Iran. The Teamsters, which ALU joined last year, is also a major backer of Trump, as is the United Auto Workers; both are headed by "reform" administrations" responsible for tens of thousands of layoffs.

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, which is also part of the Teamsters, has launched a racist campaign against Mexican engineers as "national security" risks. The NABTU building trades union has even called for an immigration raid at a factory in Arizona.

Neither the AFL-CIO nor the Teamsters issued a statement as of this writing to defend Smalls. Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien, however, has posted clips to his X/Twitter account from his podcast appearances alongside ultra-right figures such as Tucker Carlson and Vivek Ramaswamy. Their refusal to do anything or even acknowledge the attack makes them accomplices of the Israeli and American war

machines.

Workers must organize themselves to put an end to the genocide. They must not only call the union apparatus to account for their criminal silence but take initiative into their own hands, including organizing mass protests and work stoppages. The fight against the genocide must become part of a broader movement against war and dictatorship, in which the working class must play the leading role.

To coordinate such a campaign, new structures, rank-and-file committees, must be established to open lines of communication between workers across the country, both union and non-union. These committees, free from the influence of the union apparatus, will form the basis of a fight for workers' control and against the profit motive, which is responsible for war and oppression all over the world.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact