

Dockworkers in Genoa and Livorno block Israeli arms shipment, as mass protests denounce genocide in Gaza

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In a display of courage and international solidarity, dockworkers in the Italian port city of Genoa last Saturday blocked the loading of cargo bound for Israel aboard the *Zim Virginia*. The huge container ship is operated by the Israeli shipping giant ZIM Integrated Shipping Services.

Their action, taken amid one of the largest anti-genocide demonstrations in Italy in recent memory, is a sign that the working class can and must be mobilized as the central force against genocide and dictatorship.

More than 25,000 people, according to police estimates, and many more, according to organizers, flooded the streets of Genoa on Saturday evening in support of the Global Sumud Flotilla, demanding the opening of humanitarian corridors into Gaza, an end to arms shipments to Israel and an immediate halt to the genocide. The march, which began outside the headquarters of *Music for Peace*, the NGO coordinating the flotilla's mission, quickly took on an explosive character.

Word spread through the crowd that a ship belonging to ZIM, Israel's national carrier, was preparing to load 10 containers classified as dangerous goods—reportedly including explosives—just hours before an international assembly of the *Ports Coordination Against the War*, which had called for an embargo on Israeli shipping.

Responding immediately, around a thousand demonstrators broke off from the main march to support the *Collettivo Autonomo Lavoratori Portuali* (CALP), the Autonomous Collective of Port Workers. CALP dockworkers declared a spontaneous strike, refusing to load or unload the ZIM ship. Faced with mounting pressure from workers and protesters, police authorities were forced to halt the loading operation and prevent the ship's departure.

The example quickly spread. On Tuesday, dockworkers in Livorno launched a strike to refuse service to the *Zim Virginia*, acting in solidarity with Gaza and rejecting any complicity in Israel's war effort. "Despite the pressure from management, the workers are determined not to unload the

ship," declared another autonomous dockworkers' collective. "We know there will be containers with NATO weapons. We must maintain a constant presence and ensure the workers are not isolated."

ZIM, a publicly traded company listed on the New York Stock Exchange, is deeply enmeshed in Israel's military and strategic apparatus. Controlled 26 percent by Israeli billionaire Idan Ofer, the company is required by Israeli law to maintain a majority-Israeli board, an Israeli chairman and a portion of its fleet reserved for state use in times of emergency.

Ofer's political ties stretch across the Atlantic: He has donated to Britain's Conservative Party, sat on the Council on Foreign Relations and Harvard Kennedy School advisory boards, and has been linked to covert Israeli operations. He and his wife resigned from Harvard University's executive board in protest against what they characterized as a lukewarm or insensitive response by the university leadership to Hamas' attack on Israel.

A MintPress investigation revealed that Ofer family vessels have ferried Israeli commandos for assassination missions, including the killings of Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Mabhouh in Dubai and PLO official Khalil al-Wazir in Tunisia. The shipment of weapons aboard ZIM vessels is a linchpin of Israel's genocidal campaign.

Mass opposition growing in Italy

The Genoa dockworkers' defiance follows massive demonstrations in Italy on September 22, when tens of thousands of workers and youth took to the streets in more than 75 cities under the slogan "Let's Block Everything." It is part of a broader wave of resistance sweeping across Europe's ports. It demonstrates the immense potential

power of the working class to obstruct the machinery of war. Yet it also exposes the vulnerabilities of such struggles in their current form.

Figures like Genoa's center-left Mayor Silvia Salis and Archbishop Marco Tasca have mounted the stage at rallies, cloaking themselves in the language of peace and anti-genocide sentiment while working to channel the movement into harmless moral appeals. Protests, they imply, are acceptable so long as they remain subordinate to the state and do not challenge the capitalist order that fuels the genocide.

The trade union apparatus is doing what it can to limit the scope and power of the protests and redirect workers towards fruitless appeals to the capitalist parties. Sara Capalini, a leader of the USB base union, praised Genoa's example as a message "to the *government* to block everything and impose a total embargo on goods to Israel." [Emphasis added]

USB here is addressing itself to the fascist government of Giorgia Meloni, Italy's most right-wing since the fall of Mussolini (one of the coalition parties even includes the dictator's great granddaughter), as though it has any interest in opposing the war or supporting mass resistance in the working class. In reality, it is carrying out historic austerity measures in order to rearm Italian imperialism.

Meanwhile, Israel has sought to brand the Global Sumud Flotilla as a terrorist operation, claiming a "direct link between the Flotilla and Hamas" and presenting letters, photos and names as supposed evidence. This is part of a broader campaign to criminalize humanitarian aid and delegitimize international solidarity with Gaza.

Meloni's response to the Global Sumud Flotilla, which is now approaching Gaza under threat of direct Israeli military intervention, underscores this reality. "The flotilla must stop or it will place peace at risk," she declared. She argued that attempts to breach the blockade would "give a pretext to prevent peace."

This grotesque inversion of reality shifts the blame for genocide from its perpetrators to those trying to deliver food and medicine to a besieged population. The Israeli navy, including its elite Shayetet 13 commando unit, is reportedly preparing to board, seize or even sink the flotilla's ships—acts of piracy and war crimes openly condoned by imperialist governments. Italy's own navy has sought to undermine the mission by offering a "safe exit" to activists willing to abandon the effort, an act the organizers rightly denounced as sabotage.

Meanwhile, the European powers look on in silence as Israeli forces escalate their campaign. Earlier this month, flotilla vessels were attacked twice in Tunisian waters with incendiary devices and drone jamming

operations, in flagrant violation of international law.

From isolated resistance to an international movement

The blockade of the *Zim Virginia* is a commendable initial step. But it must be followed with solidarity actions by port workers across Europe and the world. ZIM and other shipping companies will simply reroute their cargo through other ports, unless dockworker actions are coordinated internationally and backed by a broader mobilization of the working class.

What is urgently needed is the formation of independent rank-and-file committees in every port, workplace, and industry—committees that break decisively from the pro-capitalist trade union bureaucracies and nationalist politics of the official "left." These committees must coordinate their actions across borders and sectors, preparing the ground for a general strike against the war.

Such a strike cannot be a mere one- or two-day protest but the first step toward confronting the capitalist system itself which is driving the world to the abyss. The slaughter in Gaza will continue, regardless of how many ships are blocked or how many rallies are held, until a powerful mass movement of the working class challenges the corporate oligarchy whose interests lie behind imperialist war.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) provides the framework for such a struggle. It fights to unite workers globally in a coordinated offensive against war, fascism and the capitalist order. The courage shown by the Genoa dockworkers and their comrades in Livorno demonstrates that the potential exists. But without political clarity, revolutionary leadership and organization, that potential will be squandered.

The blockade of the *Zim Virginia* is a spark. Whether it becomes a conflagration capable of stopping genocide depends on whether workers everywhere recognize their shared interests, unite across borders and take the fight into their own hands.



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