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The University Worker

Next steps for Palestine organising

It has now been a month since the Israeli army began a genocidal attack on Gaza. We have watched the horrors unfold on our screens. In response, there has been a generalisation of Palestine solidarity. We have seen the biggest anti-war demonstrations since the invasion of Iraq. Across Britain, there have been protests, blockades, sit-ins, and mass meetings. The movement is continuing to build and build.

The massive wave of solidarity with the Palestinian people has also been met with significant repression. Campuses have seen students suspended for solidarity campaigning. UKRI has disgracefully suspended the ED&I committee criticised by a government minister. Socialist Appeal members have been arrested for their use of language around Palestine. The state is raising the stakes for supporting Palestine and calling for an end to the genocide.

It's time for university workers to go beyond general support for Palestine. As the stakes get raised, we need to be specific in our solidarity actions. This means finding out the ways our institutions are connected to weapons manufacturers and the Israeli war machine and using our leverage in the workplace to disrupt them and cut ties. Any relationships that support the ongoing genocide, investments, and other forms of leverage like our pension scheme need to be boycotted and divested from.

Researcher Organising for Palestine in the US

UC Santa Cruz Researchers for Palestine Organizing Committee

The US labor movement is seeking concrete and material ways to heed the call for solidarity from the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions. It's clear that only certain sectors are in a position to go beyond statements, petitions, and resolutions—longshoremen, perhaps most obviously, but also the increasingly organized workers' movement in higher education.

The US Department of Defense funds billions of dollars of research in universities across the country, with variously direct and indirect ties to the US military and its pivotal support for the atrocities in Palestine. The workers in relevant labs, therefore, have levers to pull.

On our small campus, we have traced military funding to over 20 labs through discussions with union stewards and publicly available online sources. We've then mapped out the workers in these labs, including their history of engagement in labor action in our union.

We have since called through to promising (and less promising) openings, seeking to initiate lab-level meetings for workers with two goals: (1) to outline the precise labor process and its contributions to the Department of Defense; and (2) to explore possibilities for labor action. At this stage, we have three labs scheduling meetings.

In our sector, workers are trying to build something new in response to a catastrophic situation, without obvious precedents to draw upon. Our hope is that examples of researcher militancy, even if small and isolated at first, might be amplified and then replicated.

This is a strategy open to rank and file workers at any university that receives similar sources of funding, whether unionized or not, and whether labs are staffed by faculty, grads, and/or technicians.

Provisional guidance materials:

Researcher Organizing for Palestine step-by-step: tinyurl.com/Researcher4Pal

Lab Mapping Template: tinyurl.com/LabMapTemplate

Want to get involved?
Join our Uni Worker
Palestine Solidarity
WhatsApp group now!



Response to the UKRI

Over 3,000 hundred academics (at the time of writing) have now signed [the open letter](#). There is clearly a strength of feeling on the issue, both in relation to the current situation and the broader threats to academic freedom. In addition to expressing our opposition to UKRI's response, there are several concrete actions which you can now take to keep up the pressure:

* Until the decision is reversed, resign from all voluntary roles with UKRI, including serving on advisory boards and conducting peer reviews of UKRI grant applications, and do not accept future invitations to participate. Many academics have already started to do this and UCU has stated it will be [advising its members to withdraw from all UKRI advisory positions](#). This needs to be a collective action to have any traction.

* If you are a current or former UKRI grant holder, [sign this letter](#) to object to UKRI's recent decision.

* Boycott events organised by UKRI.

* Bring a model motion to your UCU branch calling on all members to do the same [Template motion here](#).

* Encourage professional associations in your discipline to express their concern to UKRI, following the lead of the [British Society for Middle Eastern Studies](#).

LSE

Students and rank-and-file UCU comrades have been organising Palestine solidarity actions at LSE, utilising existing networks and building upon networks forged through industrial action, especially the MAB. Some were targeted by the mainstream media and subsequently hate mails, harassment, and threats for publicly expressing solidarity with Palestinians. This prompted the LSE UCU committee to issue a public statement restating its commitment to academic freedom, anti-racism, and noting the silencing, policing and criminalizing of Pro-Palestinian expression and movements

Since then, twenty-five LSE UCU rank-and-file comrades from across the university have drafted a motion, 'Solidarity with Palestine and Academic Freedom', which calls for a ceasefire, and an end to the illegal occupation and settler-colonial violence. It expresses unequivocal support for the BDS movement, the Palestine Youth Movement, and Palestine Action..

On 19 October, over 200 staff and students joined a rally in solidarity with the Palestinian people. Since then, the Palestine Society have published an open letter, which includes insightful research into the investments in Israeli banks and weapons manufacturers that LSE holds. Rank-and-file comrades must join the struggle in holding LSE to account, when an ESG resolution (November 2022) already exists which reaffirms the school policy to avoid investing in weapons manufacturing that contributes to the ongoing genocide.

Essex

At the University of Essex, management has attempted to ban meetings and demonstrations on campus, as well as pressuring students who have tried to organise. Despite this, a successful demonstration was held on campus in solidarity with Palestine. A UCU speaker launched an open letter demanding an immediate end to the relationship between the University of Essex and BAE systems: <https://tinyurl.com/BAESystemsEssex> - the only response from management so far has been to request a correction that they did not support the boycott of apartheid in South Africa, it was only staff and students.

Manchester

For the second week in a row, students, staff and pro-Palestinian activists gathered to protest the University of Manchester's embroilment in Israeli settler colonialism on Wednesday November 1st. The protest coincided with a meeting of the University's Senate, and saw demonstrators surround the building in which the meeting was taking place while a small group of students accessed and disrupted the meeting. They demanded an end to all University ties with arms companies and the Israeli state, and – despite the efforts of senior management to shut down the meeting entirely – succeeded in having their demands added to the agenda, at the suggestion of Senate members. This small success shows the potential of disruption going forward, as further links between the University and Israel are identified and targeted.

UCL

At UCL, an independent meeting was organised by reps from different campus unions and in different job roles. Around 20 workers attended, with input from students organising on campus in solidarity with Palestine. It was agreed to try and coordinate more between different coalitions of workers and students organising around Palestine on campus, and to push within our unions for them to support more actions. We discussed doing an organised drive to encourage staff doing voluntary work for UKRI to resign following their suppression on free speech around Palestine. We also resolved to organise a mass "teach-in" on Palestine, and to organise a leafleting action for the global days of action next week called by Workers in Palestine.

What Is The University Worker?

The University Worker is a rank-and-file bulletin made by university workers (both academic and non-academic) we want to use this bulletin to share what's happening at different universities, and build our collective power to win our disputes.