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# The University Worker

## **Palestine Solidarity**

This special edition of The University Worker is written in response to the Israeli genocide in Gaza. Unions in higher education, including UCU, Unison, and Unite, have put out statements in solidarity with Palestine, and their banners have proudly featured on the demonstrations. But we need to do more. We believe that as workers in higher education, we cannot stand idly by as the British government, companies, and our universities continue to enable the oppression and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians.

The British government has long supported Israel and the oppression of Palestinians. British political support and armaments have enabled the development of an apartheid system in Israel and the violent dispossession of Palestinians. However, there is another story of workers and students in Britain standing up against this. Many of us were involved in student occupations in 2007/8 across British universities, building Palestinian solidarity, and organising BDS campaigns. Every time the Israeli army has invaded Gaza, there have been mass demonstrations in London. There is a proud history in the labour movement of standing up against apartheid in South Africa, the coup in Chile, and against imperialist wars.

Whether in Gaza, the West Bank, refugee camps, or in the diaspora, we stand unequivocally on the side of the oppressed and their right to resist. Now is the time for us to act. As Sai Englert has argued in the NLR: "What is standing between Gaza and genocide, then, is political pressure – an internationalist movement whose aim is to force Western governments to backtrack and restrain the Israeli killing machine ... across the board, there can be no return to business as usual. We have a collective obligation to ratchet up the pressure on our governments, and on Israel itself, to stop the genocide and mass displacement."

Universities have long served as an ideological battleground over the legitimacy of pro-Palestine sentiment in the public sphere. The very language that has become acceptable to use to describe the situation in Palestine (apartheid, settler colonialism, genocide etc.) is the outcome of struggles, both intellectual and political, within

the academy. In this respect, university workplaces have a crucial role to play in the Palestinian struggle.

Without a doubt, significant ground has been gained in building consensus over Palestinian liberation within mainstream academia. But the Tories have been desperate to turn this into a culture war issue and their crusade has taken increasingly insidious forms. In May 2019, then Minister for Universities, Chris Skidmore, announced that to clamp down on cases of antisemitism on campuses, universities should adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism - infamous for proscribing any criticism of the state of Israel. In Jan 2022, Education minister Nadhim Zahawi suggested steps to curtail staff and students' ability to express solidarity with Palestine. In the same year, the UK government suspended funding for the UK National Union of Students while ousting the president, Shaima Dallali, on the pretext that tweets she published as a child were antisemitic. We are now seeing the chilling effect of this long-running campaign to demonise Palestinian solidarity in universities. Many academics have hesitated when asked to support a motion or sign a petition for fear of recriminations. Students have been targeted and reported to the police for solidarity actions.

What we must take away from this situation is that intellectual integrity does not develop in a vacuum. Though often loath to admit it, academics are workers. This is never more clear than when academics face disciplinary action. Where intimidation tactics are being used to make solidarity with Palestinian liberation punishable, intellectual integrity will not stand on its own. What is required is a culture of resistance in the workplace which makes intellectual intimidation untenable. This will only come from building collective conviction among university workers. We urgently need to find ways to use our power as workers to disrupt the university, as well as pressure our government.

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



## **An Urgent Call from Palestinian Trade Unions: End all Complicity, Stop Arming Israel**

“...As Israel escalates its military campaign, Palestinian trade unions call on our counterparts internationally and all people of conscience to end all forms of complicity with Israel’s crimes - most urgently halting the arms trade with Israel, as well as funding and military research. The time for action is now - Palestinian lives hang in the balance.”

You can read the statement in full online here: <https://x.com/WorkersinPales1>

### **Manchester**

The University of Manchester was quick to emerge as a site of struggle as multiple students were targeted by rightwing public figures for their comments on Palestinian resistance. As early as October 9th, emails went out to academic staff discouraging any comments in the press, insisting that media enquiries be directed instead to the University’s comms team for an official response. Initially, pro-Palestinian staff and students were slow to organise. Unionised staff are exhausted by huge workloads following the sabotaged marking boycott, and student activists are re-organising themselves at the beginning of the new academic year. Nonetheless, students mobilised to support the regular demonstrations happening in Manchester, and UCU members voted to affirm our branch’s opposition to the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians and to the censorship of those campaigning for Palestinian liberation, seeing off attempts by some to turn the motion into a ‘both-sides’ condemnation of Palestinian resistance.

October 25th saw a more targeted response organised within the university, as student activist groups and some of the city’s pro-Palestinian organisations drew around 200 people to protest the university’s embroilment in the manufacture of Israeli weapons, through the National Graphene Institute. This saw a heavily overpoliced, emotional march around campus declaring unambiguous solidarity and determination to continue with this divestment campaign. A packed meeting after this - supported by several university groups, including the UCU branch - saw a new organising initiative created, with pro-Palestinian staff and students put in contact with each other to organise future efforts. This is a useful model to adopt elsewhere, particularly in universities where those opposed to settler colonialism may find themselves more isolated and unsupported by their union branch: create spaces, events and WhatsApp chats for pro-Palestinian staff and students to coordinate activity going forward.

### **UCL**

We At UCL the response to the ongoing genocide in Palestine has been mixed. So far two student societies - the Marxist society and the Socialist Alternative society - have been suspended by the students’ union, no doubt also with pressure on it from the university, for expressing solidarity with the Palestinian struggle. Students have responded with a couple of demos on campus of varying size, linking up with the students suspended at SOAS .

There’s also been a good beginning in the response from workers. The IWGB Universities branch, which has a large base at UCL, recently passed a motion in solidarity with Palestine, and has helped mobilise two IWGB blocs at the recent Saturday demos, bringing together around 50 workers each time. In the Development Planning Unit at the school of Architecture, around 50 workers have signed an open letter condemning Israeli apartheid and the collective punishment currently being inflicted on Gaza. On top of this, an open letter for all UCL workers, to build towards more concrete action, is currently being prepared by workers across different campus unions and salary grades, calling for an end to UCL’s complicity in Israel’s continued occupation and war crimes.

Whether this activity can be used as a basis for a larger political response, based on workplace actions, is yet to be seen. But at a time where the student movement and the economic struggles of the campus unions are at somewhat of a low point, it is exciting to see an overtly political struggle begin to be mobilised on campus. UCL workers will be meeting on Friday 3rd of November at 5.30 on campus to discuss more.

### **LSE**

Some staff have faced pressure from management for publicly calling for solidarity with Palestine. LSE UCU released a statement affirming support for staff expressing such solidarity. There are rumours that LSE will soon put extra pressure on academics. Students organised a rally in solidarity with Palestine supported by the local UCU branch and the student staff solidarity assembly. It was well attended with at least 150 people. Originally there were plans to join the King’s rally afterwards but that rally was cancelled. A small group of people with Israel flags made a point of taking pictures of anyone speaking or holding banners. Some students spoke about being reported to Prevent for making pro-Palestine comments in class.

### **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.