

UAW Local 4121 Resolution in Solidarity with UAW Local 2865 and Union Democracy

Co-Sponsored by: UW Academic Workers for a Democratic Union (AWDU), UW Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano/a de Aztlán (MEChA), UW Students United for Palestinian Equal Rights (SUPER), UW United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS)

WHEREAS UAW Local 2865, which represents over 14,000 student workers throughout the University of California system, has lent support to countless human rights struggles, both foreign and domestic. From Ayotzinapa, Mexico to Capetown, South Africa; from Ferguson, Missouri to Oakland, California—Local 2865 has consistently stood in solidarity with the oppressed in word and in action; and

WHEREAS in an effort to support Local 2865's commitment to universal justice and democracy, 2865 rank-and-file members are asking other unions for help. The UAW International Executive Board has intervened to nullify a democratic vote of the Union's membership in support of Boycotts, Divestments, and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel's abuses of Palestinian human rights. In so doing, the International Executive Board attempts to set a dangerous precedent that infringes on one of the fundamental rights of workers: the right to stand, even symbolically, in solidarity with oppressed peoples; and

WHEREAS following the Israeli siege on Gaza in July 2014 which killed over 1,500 civilians, including 539 children¹, the Joint Council of Local 2865 was approached by a group of rank-and-file members asking them to support this divestment resolution. Rather than exercising their power to endorse resolutions under the UAW Constitution, the Joint Council chose to hold a member vote on the resolution, demonstrating their deep commitment to union democracy; and

WHEREAS Local 2865 engaged in months of educational forums and debates, engaging with rank-and-file members on both sides of this political debate; and

WHEREAS Local 2865 held a membership vote on December 14, 2014 where 65% of voting members endorsed a resolution calling on the UAW International and the University of California system to end investments in corporations complicit in violations of Palestinian human rights. This vote, taken in response to a call for solidarity from every Palestinian labor union and virtually all of Palestinian civil society, elicited a high voter turnout with 2,160 total UAW Local 2865 members voting in-person at polling stations; and

WHEREAS Palestinian trade unions and civil society groups have urged allies to pursue Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) whenever possible² until such time as Israel ends its illegal occupation and colonization of Arab lands (which includes dismantling the wall in the West Bank), grants full equality to Palestinians living inside Israel who currently contend with a discriminatory legal system³, and allows Palestinian refugees to return to their homes as mandated by UN resolution 194.⁴

WHEREAS the UAW International Executive Board (IEB), in its ruling, recognized UAW 2865's education and outreach efforts and strongly defended the integrity of the voting process. Despite recognizing the vote results as the collective will of Local 2865 members, the International Executive Board chose to suspend democracy and ignore rank-and-file members who voted on the resolution; and

¹<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territories/report-israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territories/>

² <http://laborforpalestine.net/2014/07/12/urgent-call-from-gaza-civil-society-act-now/>

³ <http://www.adalah.org/en/law/index>

⁴ <http://bdsmovement.net/call>

WHEREAS the UAW IEB justified its nullification of UAW Local 2865's resolution by conflating criticism of Israel's occupation of Palestine with anti-Semitism, a practice that cheapens the ongoing reality of anti-Semitism and ignores the extensive support and work for the resolution of many Jewish and Israeli UAW members. In addition, the IEB ruling also cited fears that divestment would interfere with "the flow of commerce," a claim that UAW Local 2865 members have criticized as putting the interest of big business before the well-being and livelihood of Palestinian workers; and

WHEREAS the UAW International has taken positions on many other human rights struggles, including the struggle to boycott and divest from the South African Apartheid regime. Nelson Mandela met with UAW President Owen Bieber to personally thank him for UAW's divestment efforts after his release from prison. Rank-and-file activists initiated UAW divestment from South Africa, and UAW might not be able to proudly celebrate this piece of history if skeptical leaders had marginalized those early efforts by rank-and-file members; and

WHEREAS the UAW IEB's ruling is at odds with the pro-BDS position of many Black Lives Matter activists and international trade unions, including Britain's largest trade union, Unite.

WHEREAS The BDS caucus of UAW Local 2865 has appealed the UAW IEB's ruling to the UAW's Public Review Board and is requesting solidarity resolutions from other UAW Locals; and

WHEREAS the power of a Union isn't bestowed upon it by its elected leaders, but rather is a function of the volunteer activism of rank-and-file members; and

WHEREAS An injury to one, is an injury to all.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY UNITED AUTO WORKERS LOCAL 4121:

THAT UAW Local 4121 stands in solidarity with UAW Local 2865 rank-and-file members in protesting this subversion of union democracy by the UAW International Executive Board; and

THAT UAW Local 4121 urges the UAW International to reverse its initial ruling against UAW Local 2865's BDS resolution during the Public Review Board process; and

THAT A copy of this resolution be included in UAW Local 4121's next email communication to its membership, as well as published on the <http://www.uaw4121.org/> Homepage; and

THAT UAW Local 4121 President David Parsons send a copy of this resolution to UAW International President Dennis Williams and other members of the UAW International Executive Board, cc'ing UAW Local 2865 President Robert Cavooris, within three days of this resolution's passage.