

For Immediate Release

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GSOC for BDS Caucus:

**Historic:
NYU's Graduate Employee Union Becomes First Private University Labor
Union to Support Divestment From Israel**

In response to the call for solidarity from all major Palestinian trade unions, New York University graduate students voted to join the global [Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions \(BDS\) movement](#) for Palestinian rights. The Graduate Student Organizing Committee ([GSOC-UAW 2110](#)) is a labor union representing over 2,000 teaching assistants, adjunct instructors, research assistants and other graduate workers at New York University, and the first recognized graduate worker union at a private university in the US. 645 union members participated in a [referendum](#) that resulted in a call for NYU and UAW international to withdraw their investments from Israeli state institutions and international companies complicit in the ongoing violation of Palestinian human and civil rights. The referendum also calls on NYU to close its [program](#) in Tel Aviv University, which continues to violate [NYU's own Non-Discrimination policy](#).

366 members also pledged to adhere to the [academic boycott of Israel](#), and refrain from participating in research and programs sponsored by Israeli universities. There was an unusually large membership turnout, a testament to union democracy.

“After months of mass mobilization and a four day election, GSOC members have taken a clear stand for justice in Palestine.” says Shafeka Hashash, a member of the GSOC for BDS caucus. “This historic endorsement of BDS by GSOC at NYU occurs in the wake of growing momentum for the movement across university campuses and labor unions nationwide.”

Currently, over [eight academic associations](#) and several [national unions](#) have already endorsed BDS with a resounding majority. At the forefront of the graduate student unionization efforts in private institutions, NYU's GSOC referendum set an important precedent for both solidarity with Palestine and for union democracy.

"In addition to bringing [material gains](#) for their members, NYU graduate students are reclaiming the union as a political platform for social justice causes. Through the recent mass mobilization for justice in Palestine we have taken a stand on one of the defining political issues of our time. The referendum success is indicative of the traction the movement is gaining across university campuses, and increasingly among graduate students" said Maya Wind, a member of GSOC for BDS.

Just last week, the [Graduate Employee Organization at University of Massachusetts Amherst](#) successfully passed a BDS resolution by referendum, followed by an [academic boycott measure approved by the CUNY Doctoral Students Council](#). The impact of NYU's referendum will not only reverberate across private academic institutions where unionization efforts have gained momentum, but across the American academy more broadly.

In response to the rapidly growing success of the BDS movement, [incidents of intimidation and repression](#) against BDS activists have intensified. While legislators propose at times [unconstitutional laws](#) banning boycotts of Israel, university administrators have been cracking down on free speech when it comes to Palestine solidarity. Despite its vibrant history, today the labor movement is no different. After UAW Local 2865 passed a [BDS referendum](#) in late 2014, the UAW International Executive Board "[nullified](#)" [the results](#) on [dubious grounds](#), a decision currently under appeal. In this case, the repression of the BDS movement coincides with the repression of union democracy in the labor movement.

In the fight for social justice and against repression, the BDS movement and union democracy are natural allies. At NYU, the successful BDS referendum went ahead as planned even while the Local 2110 Executive Board [attempted to interfere](#) with democratic elections to union leadership bodies. In the NYU case, as well as the UAW “nullification” of the UC system BDS referendum, union executives have cracked down on their own membership. Just as in the UC system, the victory for BDS at NYU indisputably reflects the democratic will of the rank and file members. Not only was the BDS question brought to a referendum from over 10 percent of the membership, it also generated vigorous debate and engagement with the union among wide layers of graduate workers. As the Academic Workers for a Democratic Union [have most recently](#) made known, such an engaged rank and file poses a challenge to business as usual in the unions. This is why the BDS campaign is part of the struggle for the soul of the union.

As an academic worker union, GSOC represents another promising bridge for the BDS movement to leap from its stunning success among academic organizations into the labor movement more broadly. Already, the [Connecticut AFL-CIO](#) convention and the [United Electrical Workers](#) in the U.S. have passed resolutions endorsing BDS. “Labor, with its ability to exert real pressure on employers through strikes and workplace actions, can lend significant weight to BDS in the United States. When incorporated into labor union demands, the call to divest from Israel advances from a symbolic display to a concrete reality,” said Ziad Dallal, a steward in GSOC. “Justice in Palestine depends upon the ability of the US labor movement to demonstrate its solidarity,” Dallal added. By empowering the members themselves to speak, the emerging movement for union democracy among graduate students is helping to lead these efforts. Rank and file democracy is the future of the labor movement, and the labor movement can secure a vigorous future for BDS in the United States.

For more information, please visit www.nooccupiedpalestine.org.