

Open Letter in Support of UAW Local 2865 & Union Democracy

To the UAW International Executive Board:

We are writing to oppose your recent nullification of the BDS resolution passed by UAW 2865. We firmly believe our International should respect the decision making power of local unions and bargaining units.

We should begin by noting that, as the IEB itself has concluded, the resolution was passed by a democratic vote free of misconduct. Following the Israeli siege of Gaza in July 2014, members of Local 2865 approached their Joint Council to join the call from Palestinian trade unions to support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement. Though it was within its constitutional right to endorse the resolution, the Joint Council chose to hold a member vote. Following a series of educational forums and debates, the vote was held several months later in December 2014. 65 percent of voters supported the withholding of investments in companies “complicit in severe and ongoing human rights violations as part of the Israeli oppression of the Palestinian people.” This vote made UAW 2865 the first local union in the United States to endorse the boycott against Israel.

The IEB was then approached by a law firm representing Informed Grads, a group of local union members opposing the resolution. In its case file, the firm included a number of letters from business and labor leaders expressing their disapproval of the vote, including the International Vice Presidents of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and National President of the American Federation of Government Employees as well as the Director of Labor & Employment Relations at Caterpillar, whose equipment is used regularly for demolishing homes as well as factories, agricultural land and civilian infrastructure in the occupied Palestinian territories. We recognize that these efforts from both employers and allies put considerable pressure on the IEB.

Nevertheless, we believe that, in the interest of building a robust union reinforced by bottom-up activity, the International should have prioritized its internal democratic process over the concerns of these other parties. Moreover, we find it disingenuous of the IEB to claim that Local 2865 broke its constitutional obligation of working toward the “solidification” of the labor movement. We might point out that, in the case of divesting from South Africa, anti-apartheid activism unified and strengthened the American labor movement in the 1980s. At a time when the BDS demand is gaining traction on university campuses and more broadly among progressive forces in this country, why can’t the labor movement play a similar role? And at a time when the UAW is spending a great deal of its new organizing efforts on academic workers, many of whom care deeply about this issue, why shouldn’t our union catalyze that struggle? It will be recalled that UAW divestment from South Africa was prompted by rank-and-file initiative. The legacy of our labor movement may have been different had the International isolated those efforts in the way it is attempting to now.

As proud members of the UAW, we reject this attempt at marginalizing our comrades in Local 2865 and demand that the International reinstate their vote.

In solidarity,
Assembly of Stewards
NYU Graduate Student Organizing Committee
UAW 2110

Statement ratified by the GSOC-UAW-Local 2110 Assembly of Stewards



GSOC-UAW LOCAL 2110
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