

AFL-CIO Complicit in Murder of Palestinian Journalist Shireen Abu Akleh

Shameful behavior fits long history of AFL-CIO support for the Histadrut, an arm of the Israeli state.

By [Carol Lang](#)

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Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

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Much of the world was horrified in early May when Shireen Abu Akleh, a renowned Al Jazeera reporter, was shot in the head by Israeli troops while on assignment in Jenin in the Occupied West Bank.

Not long before, the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) President Liz Shuler had been photographed with Labor Party Chair Merav Michaeli, a strong supporter of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, along with Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). None of the three raised any outcry subsequently after Akleh was killed.

Shuler moreover sent a letter to the San Francisco Labor Council stating that its delegates could not discuss a boycott of Israel.

The AFL-CIO’s current support for Israel fits a long historical pattern. For decades now, it has allied with and sheltered the Histadrut, the Israeli trade union federation, and the Israeli state from any criticisms.

Handmaiden of the Israeli State

The Histadrut is the handmaiden of the Israeli state, and the Israeli state is a junior partner to American imperialism. The Histadrut has billed itself as a labor union and thus the defender of the Israeli working class but, if one examines it honestly, without the Histadrut, Israeli capitalism would have had a hard time getting off the ground.

The early founders of the Israeli state concur that without the Histadrut, there would likely have been no Israeli state. It does not have any semblance of independence because it is part of the state apparatus. While the Histadrut is in no way a labor union, the AFL-CIO

pretends that it is.

In the March 2009 *Electronic Intifada* article "[Histadrut: Israel's racist 'trade union,'](#)" Tony Greenstein pointed out that Golda Meir explained in 1928, "I was put on the Histadrut Executive Committee at a time when this big labor union wasn't just a trade union organization. It was a great colonizing agency." Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, contended that, without Histadrut, "I doubt whether we would have had a state."



David Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir at the Knesset in Jerusalem in 1962. [Source: [jwa.org](#)]

Trade unions often function as a bridge between the needs of the bosses and those of the workers, but with a trade union such as the Histadrut, with its lack of any semblance of independence, it is virtually impossible to call this a trade union.

The fascists of both the Mussolini and Hitler stripes led states that were corporatist states, that is everyone who participated in the economy was "represented" by the state as opposed to having independent organizations that could pressure the government to bend to their needs.

The unions were not independent, they sat on the corporate boards. In the case of Italy, the unions were completely smashed and what remained was a representative, but in the case of Israel, the Histadrut is part of the capitalist class itself.

It helped to organize capitalism and helped to drive out the indigenous peoples, that is, they helped to colonize Palestine.

In a series of strikes that were either mixed, that is Palestinian and Jew, or were organized by Palestinian workers alone, the Histadrut sent in strikebreakers.

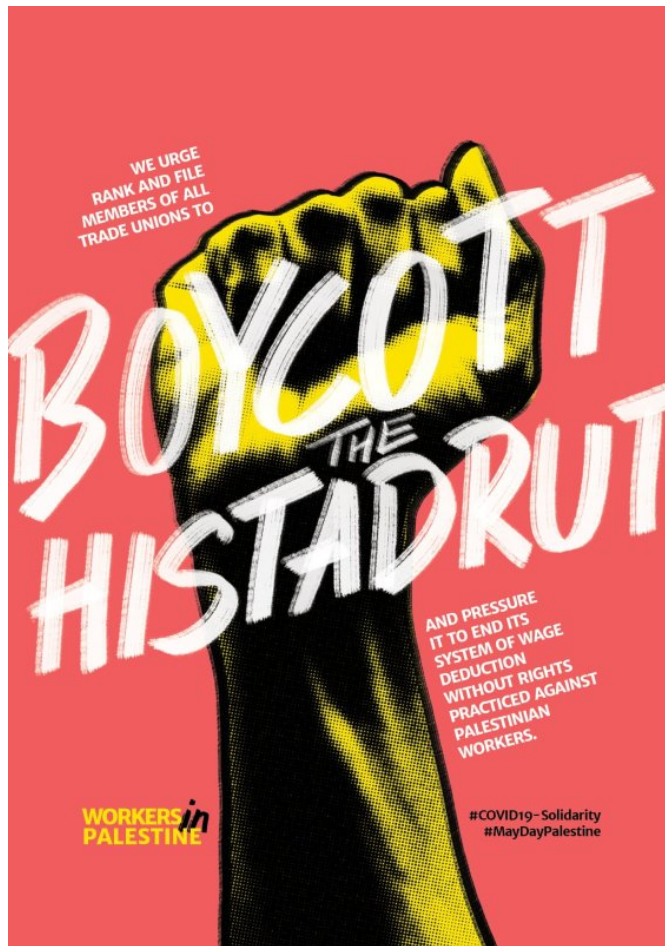
Therefore, if we examine the remarks of the two most influential persons in the Israeli

project, that is Golda Meir and David Ben-Gurion, it is clear in an unabashed explanation that the Histadrut is an arm of the Israeli state, not only an organizer of industry, and is part of the settler colonial project and, unlike the sellout politics and class collaborationist politics of the AFL-CIO, the very purpose of the Histadrut was to get this project under way.

Histadrut was the owner of 25% of the capitalist industries which often employed strikebreakers so that any independent activity of the working class would be shut down. Thus, any well-respected capitalist nation wishes and needs to expand its economic and political influence in the rest of the world, but for the moment, the Israelis decided that the Middle East was its back door.



A Zionist poster from the 1930s calling on Jewish settlers to buy watermelons only produced in Jewish settlements. [Source: electronicintifada.net]



[Source: samidoun.net]

Imperialism thus became the driving force of the Israeli economy.

Tony Greenstein also argues that, ["in 1958, the International Institute for Development, Cooperation and Labor Studies was established as a means of furthering Western interests in the Third World. Half of its graduates came from The Asian Institute for Labor Studies and Cooperation funded by the CIA through the AFL-CIO.](#) It operated on behalf of the U.S. in African countries such as Zaire and Kenya." It thus operated as an arm of Israeli and U.S. foreign policy.

Israel and Apartheid South Africa

Israel has often been described as an apartheid state because of its mistreatment of the Palestinians. It is not that well known, however, that Israel was actively committed to supporting the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Not seeing this as a morally repugnant nation, Israel armed the white South African regime, modeling its own policies on South African apartheid, suppressing the Palestinian people.



Menachem Begin, Moshe Dayan and Yitzhak Rabin visiting with South African Prime Minister B.J. Vorster (third from the left) in Jerusalem in 1976. [Source: africaisacountry.com]

Tony Greenstein wrote: "Iskoor steel company, 51 percent owned by Histadrut's Koor Industries and 49 percent by the South African Steel Corporation, manufactured steel for South Africa's armed forces. [Partly finished steel was shipped from Israel to South Africa, enabling the apartheid state to escape tariffs.](#)"

Greenstein continued: "[Other Histadrut companies such as Tadiran and Soltam were equally complicit in supplying South Africa with weaponry.](#) [It] also helped build the electronic wall between South Africa/Namibia and neighboring African states."

In the early 1960s, the Histadrut was a conduit for CIA and Mossad in Africa and later cooperated with the AFL-CIO's AIFLD program and the CIA to undermine rural cooperatives in El Salvador.



Mossad agent David Ben Uziel photographed training South Sudanese rebels in 1969-1971. [Source:

Suppressing Class Struggle and Discriminating Against Arabs

Histadrut is recognized by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions as the representative of all Israeli workers, even though its very nature is to discriminate against Arab workers. However, class struggle was anathema to the Histadrut generally.

In 1951, seamen who were on strike were drafted into the army with Histadrut support. This goes back as far as the 1920s when the [Gdud Avodah workers went on strike and were starved into submission by Ben-Gurion](#).

The organization's class collaborationism has not only undermined Arab workers, but it has undermined Jewish workers as well, with the inevitable outcome that we are witnessing now, that is with the utter racism that is being displayed by many of the Jewish working class.

This is how a capitalist arrives at implanting a colonial settler state. The Jewish working class, at the beginning of this project, believed that it was setting up a socialist society; the Jewish capitalists thought differently and used this desire for liberation as a battering ram against Palestinians who are the indigenous peoples.

All the evidence points to the criminality of people such as Ben-Gurion who explicitly said that [class struggle meant struggle against Arab labor](#).

Ben-Gurion argued that "the role of the working class was a national one, to construct the Jewish state: ["Socialism was never an aim in itself but a tool for the advancement of national objectives."](#) It was Ben-Gurion who ["coined the slogan from class to nation...both perspectives saw the role of labor as a nationalist role."](#)

This perspective was one that was very much supported by fascist governments such as Mussolini's Italy.

The Histadrut founded Haganah, the Zionist terrorist group, in the 1920s and Mapai, which became the Israeli Labor Party, in the 1930s. Greenstein wrote [that Ben-Gurion was "Histadrut's first secretary-general, became in 1935 chairman of the Jewish Agency, the Zionist government-in-waiting, and in 1948 prime minister of the State of Israel."](#)



David Ben-Gurion addresses Histadrut members in 1924. [Source: atlantajewishtimes.com]

Ben-Gurion made it clear that there was no reason to respect Palestinian rights and that it was also clear that the Palestinians, understandably, would not give up their land without a fight.

He stated that ["we do not recognize the right of the \[Palestinian\] Arabs to rule the country, since Palestine is still undeveloped and awaits its builders."](#)

And so the Labor Party was created and, it too pretends that it is somehow championing the cause of labor.

The list of Israeli crimes has been documented in thousands of books, but it is the pretend nature of its support for workers, that is, it is a labor union of some sort, which allows the AFL-CIO to pretend as well.

The list of crimes of the Israeli state and its partner the Histadrut is much more extensive, but having limited space, the focus of this article is on the relationship between the AFL-CIO and the Histadrut and the Israeli state.

On the Side of the Oppressor

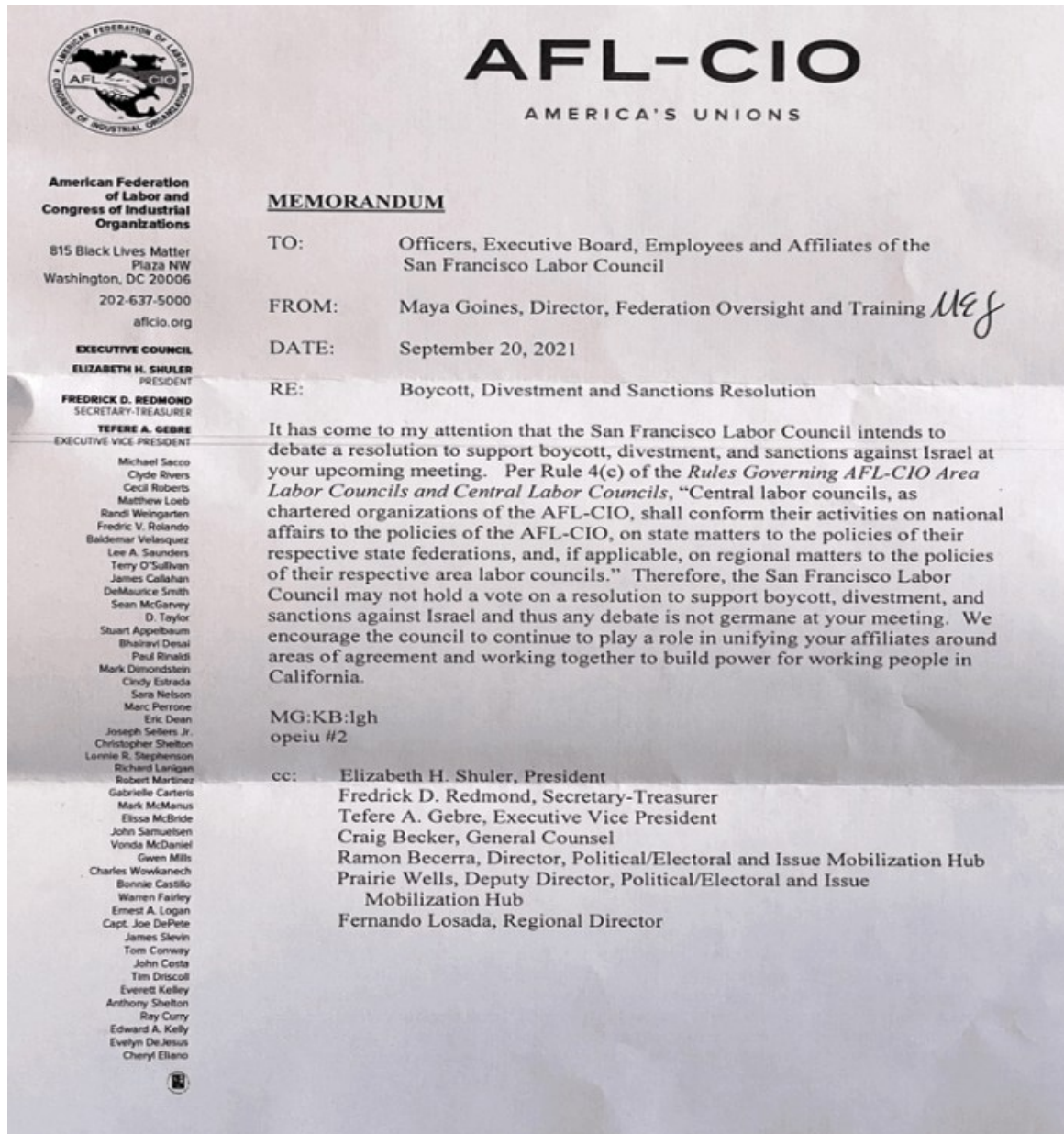
So why is the AFL coming down on the side of the oppressor?

The history of the AFL has been one of racism and sexism and elitism from the very jump. It historically worked and continues to work with management, protecting white male workers, and thus they have been able to win contracts more effectively for the aristocracy of labor, but in the process, it has sold out everyone else. Therefore, they are no stranger to organizations such as the Histadrut and will thus lend a hand to the bosses.

After the killing of Palestinian-American reporter Shireen Abu Akleh, the San Francisco Labor Council tried to entertain a resolution over Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS).

National AFL-CIO Western Region Field Director Fernando Losada said: "Expressions of solidarity [are] always good, But in terms of setting international policy, that is the purview of the national AFL-CIO through our organizational processes. There's an existing policy in solidarity with working people in the Holy Land. It does not include BDS."

According to *The Intercept*, AFL-CIO leadership [cited a procedural rule to tell the San Francisco Labor Council it could not even debate a resolution on BDS](#).



The image shows a scanned document titled "AFL-CIO AMERICA'S UNIONS". On the left is the AFL-CIO logo and contact information for the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, including the address 815 Black Lives Matter Plaza NW, Washington, DC 20006, and phone number 202-637-5000. Below this is a list of the Executive Council members, starting with Elizabeth H. Shuler as President and Fredrick D. Redmond as Secretary-Treasurer. The main body of the document is a memorandum dated September 20, 2021, addressed to the Officers, Executive Board, Employees and Affiliates of the San Francisco Labor Council. The subject is "Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Resolution". The memorandum is signed by Maya Goines, Director of Federation Oversight and Training, with a handwritten signature. The text of the memorandum states that it has come to the attention of the San Francisco Labor Council that it intends to debate a resolution to support boycott, divestment, and sanctions against Israel. It then cites Rule 4(c) of the Rules Governing AFL-CIO Area Labor Councils and Central Labor Councils, which states that central labor councils, as chartered organizations of the AFL-CIO, shall conform their activities on national affairs to the policies of the AFL-CIO, on state matters to the policies of their respective state federations, and, if applicable, on regional matters to the policies of their respective area labor councils. The memorandum concludes by stating that therefore, the San Francisco Labor Council may not hold a vote on a resolution to support boycott, divestment, and sanctions against Israel and thus any debate is not germane at your meeting. It encourages the council to continue to play a role in unifying affiliates around areas of agreement and working together to build power for working people in California. The memorandum is signed MG:KB:lgh and opeiu #2. The distribution list (cc:) includes Elizabeth H. Shuler, President; Fredrick D. Redmond, Secretary-Treasurer; Tefere A. Gebre, Executive Vice President; Craig Becker, General Counsel; Ramon Becerra, Director, Political/Electoral and Issue Mobilization Hub; Prairie Wells, Deputy Director, Political/Electoral and Issue Mobilization Hub; and Fernando Losada, Regional Director.

AFL-CIO
AMERICA'S UNIONS

MEMORANDUM

TO: Officers, Executive Board, Employees and Affiliates of the San Francisco Labor Council

FROM: Maya Goines, Director, Federation Oversight and Training *MGJ*

DATE: September 20, 2021

RE: Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Resolution

It has come to my attention that the San Francisco Labor Council intends to debate a resolution to support boycott, divestment, and sanctions against Israel at your upcoming meeting. Per Rule 4(c) of the *Rules Governing AFL-CIO Area Labor Councils and Central Labor Councils*, "Central labor councils, as chartered organizations of the AFL-CIO, shall conform their activities on national affairs to the policies of the AFL-CIO, on state matters to the policies of their respective state federations, and, if applicable, on regional matters to the policies of their respective area labor councils." Therefore, the San Francisco Labor Council may not hold a vote on a resolution to support boycott, divestment, and sanctions against Israel and thus any debate is not germane at your meeting. We encourage the council to continue to play a role in unifying your affiliates around areas of agreement and working together to build power for working people in California.

MG:KB:lgh
opeiu #2

cc: Elizabeth H. Shuler, President
Fredrick D. Redmond, Secretary-Treasurer
Tefere A. Gebre, Executive Vice President
Craig Becker, General Counsel
Ramon Becerra, Director, Political/Electoral and Issue Mobilization Hub
Prairie Wells, Deputy Director, Political/Electoral and Issue Mobilization Hub
Fernando Losada, Regional Director

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[Source: theintercept.com]

I am of the opinion, and it is the opinion of others in the Labor Education Project on AFL-CIO International Operations (LEPAIO), that the AFL-CIO is complicit in the murder of Shireen and so many others since Shuler and Weingarten met with the leader of the Israeli Labor Party and Shuler sent a letter to the San Francisco Labor Council stating that delegates could not discuss a boycott of Israel.



Shireen Abu Akleh [Source: [aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com)]

Let us not forget that the Interior Minister of Israel is a member of the Labor Party who supported the murder of the journalist, and the Labor Party supports the apartheid state and Liz Shuler supports the State of Israel.

Thus, instead of being in solidarity with the Palestinians, U.S. labor has taken the side of the oppressor.

Every time members of any union have attempted to defend the rights of the Palestinians, the AFL-CIO has stepped in to defend the Israeli state and has either sidelined Palestinian rights or has forcefully defended the actions of the Israelis and have prevented any dissent among its members.

This is clearly demonstrated in a [manual](#) written by the Jewish Labor Committee in 2008 for pro-Israel lobby groups. It blatantly advises:

“Please DO NOT discuss with union members, representatives of the press or others, guesstimates of the value of State of Israel Bonds held by unions. ‘Divest from Israel’ activists have used such information in their arguments and have quoted figures found in Jewish newspapers and/or provided by Jewish communal representatives.”

Randi Weingarten, the President of the AFT, is a member of this organization.

Since the 1950s, the U.S. labor movement has continued to invest in Israeli bonds using their pension funds. The American labor unions collectively hold millions in Israeli bonds. The AFT alone reported to the DOL that the union has invested \$200,000 in State of Israel bonds. Richard Trumka, the former head of the AFL-CIO, absolutely opposed support for BDS.



Richard L. Trumka [Source:

obamawhitehouse.archives.org]

Change Gonna Come?

But now, things are decidedly changing, that is, there is more of an awareness among American workers that the situation in Israel is untenable and they will no longer support the repression of the Palestinians.

More recently (2010), members of the Connecticut AFL-CIO successfully got the state labor federation to [dump](#) its \$25,000 in Israeli bonds and, five years later, the Connecticut federation passed a [resolution](#) calling on the national AFL-CIO to support BDS. (This vote was later annulled by Trumka.)



Fifty activists picketed an awards dinner in June 2011, telling then-New York State AFL-CIO President Denis Hughes that his support for investments in Israel betrays basic principles of labor solidarity. [Source: labornotes.org]

But just recently, major unions and labor federations in Oregon passed unprecedented resolutions calling for divestment from an Israeli company over its human rights abuses.

In Oregon, the AFL-CIO and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal

Employees (AFSCME), collectively representing more than 300,000 workers in the state, passed a resolution calling for the state to divest from the fund that owns Israeli spyware firm NSO.



[Source: twitter.com]

And finally, in my union, the Professional Staff Congress, the International Committee, along with the Academic Freedom Committee and the Anti-Racism Committee, passed a resolution on Palestine (May 2021) which passed almost unanimously at the Delegate Assembly.

Almost immediately afterwards, the Zionists in the union went on the attack and the resolution has all but been suppressed. The Zionists, as we can see, hold tremendous sway in the unions.

American workers are far ahead of our “leaders” and, with a different leadership, we could make headway fighting for the democratic rights of oppressed peoples; but if we don’t break, not only on this issue, but similar ones such as a women’s right to choose, Black rights, etc., we will be moving closer and closer to a fascist society.

The economy is breaking down and right before our eyes, the society is disintegrating. Workers need a new leadership. Victory can only be won with a conscious, organized working class that is willing to build a movement that will knock down the barriers that capitalism sets up to divide us and that means we must start by dumping our “leaders” and replacing them with a socialist leadership, since they are the main obstacle standing in the way of this effort.

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