

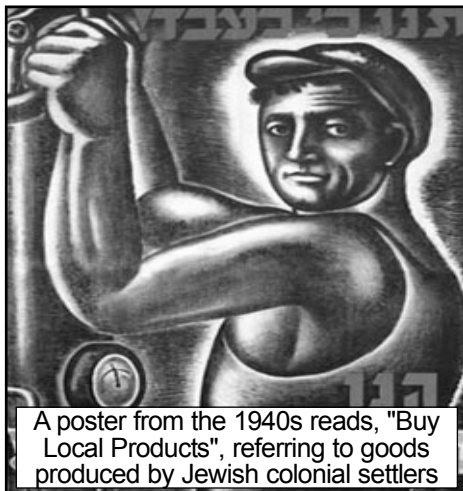


Gaza HQ of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) destroyed by Israel, Feb 2008

trade unions. However, Palestinian trade unions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are not permitted to carry out trade union activities in Israel. The Palestinian members of Histadrut, may not elect, or be elected to, its leadership bodies."

Little wonder that in 2007 a coalition of Palestinian labour organisations urged the international trade union movement to shun the Histadrut and reject its attempts to whitewash the occupation:

"Since its inception, the Histadrut has supported the Occupation and enacted racist policies against our workers, denying them their rights. It has kept silent in front of Israel's crimes against our people throughout the decades of occupation. We are thus asking the international trade unions to boycott the Histadrut to pressure it to guarantee rights for our workers and to pressure the government to end the occupation and to recognize the full rights of the Palestinian people."



A poster from the 1940s reads, "Buy Local Products", referring to goods produced by Jewish colonial settlers

THE HISTADRUT AND ISRAELI APARTHEID

Briefing document from the Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign

One of the strongest voices raised against the international campaign for a boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel has been that of the Histadrut, Israel's trade union federation. Histadrut has been especially vocal in opposing support by trade unions for the boycott campaign and has sent representatives to labour gatherings around the world to promote its views. It presents itself as an organisation that supports peace between Israel and the Palestinians and claims to oppose the boycott because it is counter-productive. But this image is completely deceptive.



BOYCOTTS DIVESTMENT SANCTIONS

In fact, the Histadrut fully supports the colonial occupation of Palestinian land by the Israeli state, the racist discrimination which goes hand-in-hand with that occupation, and the violence used to enforce it. **There is no mere tactical difference between the Histadrut and trade unionists campaigning for solidarity with the Palestinian people - it is a fundamental difference of principle between those who support the illegal occupation and those who oppose it.**

Histadrut and the Gaza massacre

In January 2009, as Israeli tanks and aircraft rained down explosives on the Gaza Strip, the Histadrut issued a statement aimed at the international trade union movement which fully supported the Israeli military offensive. According to the statement: *"Israel embarked on Operation 'Cast Lead' after acting with great restraint for many years towards unbearable terror attacks from Gaza and making every diplomatic attempt to avoid confrontation ... Israel had no choice but to respond to the repeated attacks and aggression as an act of justifiable self-defence."* It praised *"the sincere desire of Israel to avoid harming uninvolved Palestinians by issuing warnings prior to attacks"*

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HISTADRUT: ISRAEL'S COLONIAL, RACIST TRADE UNION FEDERATION

and placed the blame for any civilian casualties at the door of Hamas, for employing "*despicable tactics - such as targeting Israeli civilians while using Palestinian civilians as human shields*".

The claims made by the Histadrut to justify the bombardment of Gaza fly in the face of evidence collected by journalists, human rights agencies, and the United Nations fact-finding mission headed by Richard Goldstone. Goldstone's investigation found that "*the Israeli armed forces had carried out direct intentional strikes against civilians*" and described "*the repeated failure to distinguish between combatants and civilians*" as "*the result of deliberate guidance issued to soldiers, as described by them, and not the result of occasional lapses*".

The inquiry team saw no evidence that Hamas had used Palestinian civilians as "human shields", as claimed by the Histadrut, although it noted that "Israeli troops used Palestinian men as human shields whilst conducting house searches". The findings of the report were endorsed by the overwhelming majority of delegates at the UN General Assembly - including the representative of the Irish government.

The statement issued by the Histadrut can only be seen as a deliberate attempt to mislead the international labour movement and provide cover for the war crimes being committed by Israeli forces in Gaza. Trade unionists should remember this track record of deception when they hear claims being made by representatives of the Histadrut.



Fire fighters in Gaza battle to control a blaze in a UN compound in Gaza after an Israeli bombardment during 'Operation Cast Lead' in January 2009

Israeli Apartheid: The role of the Histadrut

The support given by the Histadrut to the attack on the people of Gaza fits into a long pattern of complicity with the oppression of the Palestinian people. The Histadrut was never simply a trade union federation; Israeli prime minister Golda Meir described the organisation as "a great colonizing agency" and it was for many years one of the biggest employers in Israel. Histadrut-owned industries actively collaborated with the apartheid regime in South Africa, supplying steel to the South African army in defiance of international sanctions.

The Histadrut was founded on explicitly racist principles. Arab workers were banned from joining until 1959. When they were finally allowed to join the federation they were confined to a separate, Arab section. The Histadrut has collected dues from Arab members but given them no real representation, refusing to challenge the racist discrimination they face under Israeli rule. When Russian immigrants began moving to Israel in the 1990s, the Histadrut supported the policy of sacking Arab

workers and replacing them with the new arrivals. In 2009 when the Israeli rail authorities sacked Palestinian workers, Histadrut refused to intervene on their behalf.

According to the *Annual Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights* issued by the International Trade Union Confederation in 2007:

"Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip who work in Israel have the right to organise their own unions in Israel or to join Israeli

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