

# FROM THE SOL-OR FACTORY STRIKE TO THE PALESTINIAN NEW FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS (PNFTU)

## THE RE-BIRTH OF THE PALESTINIAN LABOUR MOVEMENT

The [Palestinian New Federation of Trade Unions](#) (PNFTU), or New Unions, are born out of the longest and most effective strike in the post WWII history of Palestinian labour 15 years ago.

They are a response to Israel's ongoing illegal occupation and brutal apartheid regime, which thrive on systematic exploitation, discrimination, and the absence of protection for Palestinian workers. The New Unions are a spark of hope that was not ignited by political decision or a contribution of the elite, it came from the struggle of the workers themselves and from their determination to have a voice that would defend their rights and dignity.

**This month we introduce the PNFTU Team, our comrades in occupied Palestine will now contribute regular articles for the Newsletter!**

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## The Sol-Or Factory Strike: 2010

### The PNFTU Team report on six months of Resilience (Sumoud) and the re-birth of the Palestinian Trade Union Movement

Location: The Gishuri Industrial Zone, an illegal Israeli industrial settlement built on the occupied lands of Tulkarm Governorate, West Bank, near the Green Line.

The Sol-Or Factory was specialised in filling methane gas cylinders (cooking gas) and bromine gas, an extremely toxic gas. They employed dozens of Palestinian labourers working in harsh conditions: Their daily wage ranged between 12 to 24 US dollars; an amount insufficient to meet the needs of a small family.

The work environment was deadly. Workers lacked even the most basic safety measures and proper sanitation. Eight workers were killed there. Five died from cancer caused by constant exposure to the chemicals, and three were killed when one of the large gas cylinders exploded while they were doing maintenance work, and so they died from severe burns.

This prompted the 85 workers to go on strike, demanding an improvement of the working environment, protective equipment, and sanitary facilities. The factory owners did not respond to their demands. After two weeks, the owners decided to fire the workers' committee that had organised the strike.

The workers, rising and unionising, escalated their demands and also demanded higher wages in line with Israeli labour law, which supposedly should apply to them. In response, the owners threatened to replace the workers with other workers from neighbouring factories. Hence, the workers decided to organise a round-the-clock picket line in front of the factory gates to prevent any workers from entering.

As the weeks and months passed, the striking workers needed support to provide for themselves and their families. The workers' committee contacted the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) to support the strike and provide the necessary means to sustain it. They also contacted official and unofficial bodies, but were left alone in this struggle. The workers then decided to rely on their own resources to continue the strike.

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## The Sol-Or Factory Strike: 2010



### The Palestine New Federation of Trade Unions

New Unions

The workers' committee decided to approach the bank and take out a loan at their own expense, providing bread for each worker as long as the strike continued. They also approached the municipality to postpone the payment of water and electricity bills to the striking workers until the end of the strike. They distributed food coupons to each worker. At the same time, they filed a lawsuit against the factory in the Israeli courts.

The strike lasted six months, after which the factory collapsed, an Israeli bank took over, and it was sold to another Israeli investor. The workers also won the court case and were awarded around 2 million US dollars as compensation. The new owner was forced to negotiate with the workers' committee to operate the factory and agreed to the workers' demands.

Strengthened by this victory, the workers realised that it was crucial to build a union that truly defended workers' issues and concerns and was ready to fight when it was most needed. They started working towards a progressive union whose priority is to defend workers' rights, dignity, and national identity, and considers our class struggle inseparable from our national struggle.

The PNFTU was not established as a top-down federation, but as a direct demand from the workers who experienced the struggle firsthand and saw how organisation and resilience can change facts on the ground.

The PNFTU quickly expanded to include 28 labour unions representing various sectors. It relied on volunteer work and a spirit of solidarity, far from political party affiliations that have hindered the work of previous unions. This gave Palestinian workers, for the first time in decades, a truly independent union voice. The PNFTU held its first conference in 2016 after it had met the conditions for establishing a general federation.

**Next month the PNFTU Team will address present & future challenges and the realities of Palestinian Labour during Genocide**

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## Disrupt Complicity Weekend

The PNFTU Team on how we can disrupt complicity



Global Weekend of Action  
18 – 21 September

The struggle of the New Unions is of course not only a labour struggle but an integral part of the Palestinian liberation struggle. The fight against the exploitation of Palestinian labour for the benefit of Israel's apartheid economy is an integral part of the Palestinian struggle to overcome its settler-colonial project and achieve self-determination.

The international trade union movement and each and every worker is being [called to stand](#) at this horrifying moment in history, together with the Palestinian working class and the Palestinian people.

Palestinian unions and civil society have united in a call for action, spearheaded by the [BDS National Committee](#). With escalating, disruptive BDS actions **now** against complicit states, corporations and institutions, building up to mass disruption from 18 – 21 September, the UN General Assembly deadline for Israel to end its illegal occupation and apartheid

As a matter of life-or-death urgency, we call for the forming of broad [coalitions](#) and for workers to build toward powerful mass action during the [disruption weekend](#), including strikes where feasible. These should be context-sensitive, peaceful and strategic, targeting complicit entities and calling for the ending of complicity, and imposition of lawful sanctions - particularly military and energy embargoes. It is the duty of unions to ensure that the workers they represent—whether in ports, on ships, in businesses, or in government offices—are not involved, often without their knowledge and/or consent, in actions that involve complicity in genocide, apartheid, and Israel's illegal occupation.

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## Quiet Solidarity: No Longer Enough

“The slain journalists of Gaza must be an inspiration to us all”



The [National Union of Journalists](#) (NUJ) has protested the murder of journalists in Gaza, with demonstrations held in both Edinburgh & Glasgow.

Vigils were called in the aftermath of the [deliberate targeting](#) of the tent where Al Jazeera journalists were working close to al-Shifa Hospital. Among the murdered were Al Jazeera staff members Anas al-Sharif (28), Mohammed Qreiqeh (33), Ibrahim Zaher (25), and Mohammed Noufal (29).

More journalists have been killed in Palestine in the past year than anywhere in living memory - simply because truth is a threat to those who commit genocide.

As one speaker in Edinburgh pointed out, it takes a lot for the NUJ to get to the point of street demonstrations. But the time for quiet solidarity whilst colleagues perish has long passed, to offer sympathy is not enough. If the murdered journalists are to be honoured, it must be with action.

The contrast between risking everything to tell the truth and parroting propaganda, and looking the other way, as some do here, couldn't be clearer.

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## John Swinney: Now Take Action

"It's quite clear that there is a genocide in Palestine. It can't be disputed" - John Swinney after our protest at Edinburgh Fringe



We have dragged the Scottish Government, kicking and screaming, to the point where after nearly two years — they finally admit what we have always known; [this is genocide](#).

Without the pressure applied, including the [action at the Stand Club](#) in Edinburgh on 2 August we would not be here. Having finally accepted that genocide is taking place there are obligations that must be met, and workers have a vital role to play.

The acknowledgement brings the most serious of responsibilities; an obligation on the Scottish Government to do all in its power to refrain from complicity and to prevent the genocide, whilst punishing those responsible.

We appeal for you to [sign and share our letter](#) which sets out three key steps the Scottish Government can take towards meeting obligations and responsibilities under international law. Two of these are the same steps the FM committed to discussing with us in April, a conversation avoided ever since.

It doesn't have to be like this - the First Minister could belatedly show leadership and elevate Scotland to the ranks of those nations willing to act.

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## Police Scotland: Who do you serve?



The First Minister could also call off the Police Scotland attack dogs - as our members continue to be [harassed, pursued and charged](#) for peaceful resistance to the genocide. Policing and prosecution are a devolved matter, yet we see the absurdity of the full force of law enforcement being used not against those facilitating what the Scottish Government now calls genocide, but against those protesting it!

It is clear that some Police Scotland officers have relished the opportunity to use counter-terrorism powers to aggressively harass and intimidate. During a recent incident in Edinburgh a hospitality worker filmed the [arrest of Paul Lavery](#) and was forced under threat of arrest and charge under terrorism legislation, to delete the video, and prove that this had been done. This destruction of evidence, and harassment and bullying of somebody in their workplace is outrageous - and must be challenged.

Bodies including the [Scottish Human Rights Commission](#) have warned of risks to human rights in policing of protests whilst the [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) has raised serious concerns that counter-terrorism laws being applied to conduct that is not terrorist in nature and the threat to fundamental freedoms. Responsibility for the legislation lies with Labour, but this repression is happening on Mr Swinney's watch. Police Scotland's role should be to maintain public safety and uphold the law, not to arrest people for their political beliefs or peaceful protest. The Scottish Government has the ability to set priorities for crime prevention and how particular crimes are treated but again has shown no sign of independent thought, and meekly followed Westminster down the authoritarian road.

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## Workers Conference on Palestine



We have begun planning for our Workers Conference on Palestine with some key individuals contacted to join the planning group. Would you like to be involved?

Either in the planning, or as a participant?

The conference is being facilitated by SPSC but membership is not a prerequisite, we are reaching out to all workers in Scotland and seek to hold a broad based gathering of activists and members who are interested in moving beyond words to effective action.

The timing of the conference is subject to the availability of our partners in Palestine, but it is important to push on with the organising work at this point.

**Do you want to get involved?**

Please [get in touch](#)

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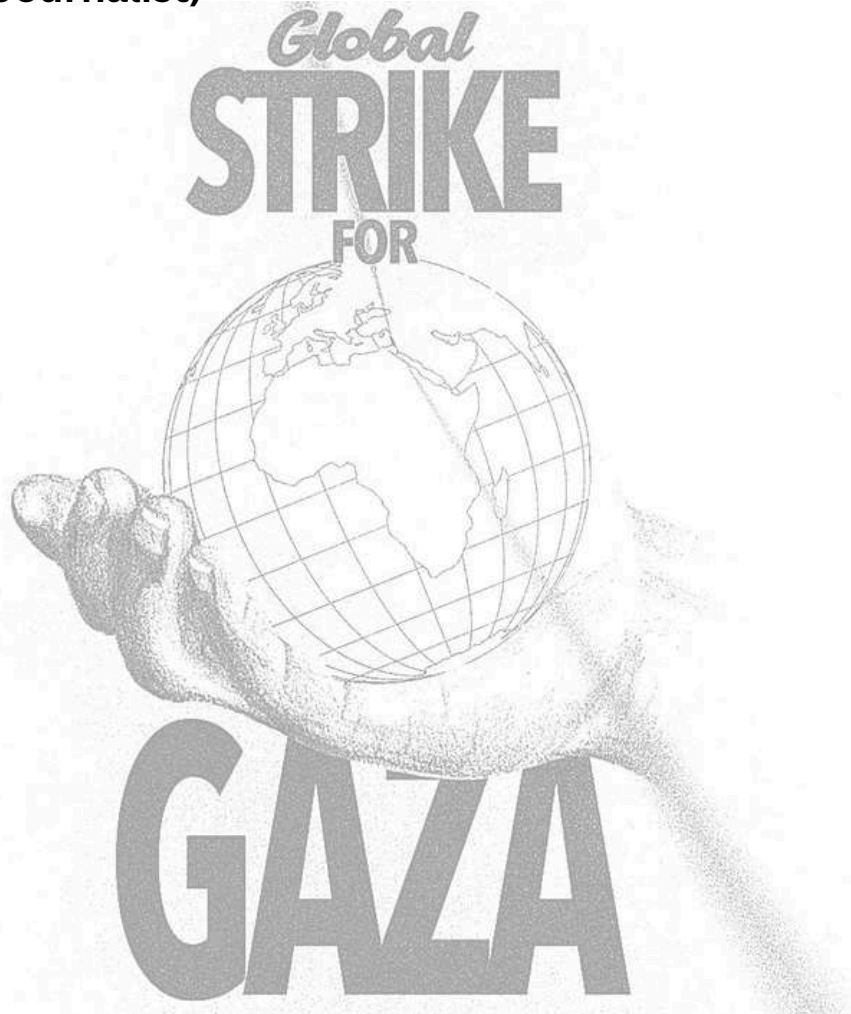


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## Global Strike: Heeding the call

**“We do what hurts them most: stop the economy – Khalas!” – Bisan Owda (Gazan Journalist)**



### **Gabi Nogueira reports on the Global Strike for Gaza**

In the wake of the “israeli” ground invasion of Gaza City, renowned journalist and content creator Bisan Owda issued a powerful call to action on Tuesday, 19th August, through social media, setting it ablaze. She called for international solidarity and a [global economic strike](#) to challenge the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

It’s time for us to be loud to the amount that no news outlets or news media can neglect or ignore anything we are doing,” continued Owda in her video-statement.

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## Global Strike: Heeding the call

The 28-year-old is one of Gaza's leading voices and well-known journalists, emerging as one of the territory's most prominent on-the-ground reporters amid the ongoing slaughter of her people. Last year, Owda won an Emmy-award for her series on the Al Jazeera Media Network *It's Bisan from Gaza and I'm Still Alive*. Her plea quickly echoed around the world, spreading like wildfire.

Grassroots advocacy group [Humaniti Project](#) amplified the call:

"Israel is moving to ethnically cleanse Gaza City while starving 2 million people to death. We cannot sit on our phones and watch this happen. We are listening to Bisan's call – it is time to escalate on a global level."

The demand is clear. When governments refuse to listen and systematically fail to fulfil their duties under international law – that is to prevent, stop and punish acts of genocide – we, as a global collective, must strike where it hurts them most: their pockets. The group stressed that a one-off "strike-day" can make a political point, but sustained action and repetition "creates measurable patterns in economic data."

Set to happen **every Thursday from here on out**, the campaign calls for widespread, strategic economic boycott – withholding spending, delaying bank transactions, avoiding public transport, and refraining from purchasing fuel.

Though withdrawing labour is encouraged, organisers recognise not everyone can risk losing their jobs, and advise: "where possible, consider using holiday pay or annual leave to reduce production on Thursdays. Even if you cannot stay home, your participation in the spending strike alone is a massive contribution."

As workers and trade unionists in Scotland, we understand the power of collective withdrawal of labour and economic participation – as a potent tool to enforce change when governments and institutions fail to act.

The weekly strike for Gaza is a powerful opportunity to show tangible solidarity with Palestine. The SPSC Trade Union Network fully endorses this initiative and calls on trade unionists to organise and amplify the message.

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## Barclays: Workers Take Action

For the first time Unite the Union members in Barclays have held a demo calling for Barclays to end complicity!



SPSC members joined the 26 August gathering at Barclays campus in Glasgow, and heard powerful, thought provoking testimonies from workers - staff who have been silenced and their voices repressed by senior management. These powerful, thought provoking statements were read anonymously, with many reflecting a sense of “shame and sadness”.

The solidarity movement must focus on building links and supporting the Barclays staff members, these are workers in a difficult position, one that many are clearly uncomfortable with. The speakers were all clear - we must encourage union membership and support the Barclays workers to oppose the genocide, and shame the decision makers who bankroll Israel’s policies of annihilation.

The [leaflets produced](#) for staff members were informative and engaging - we welcome this very positive development and offer our full support to these workers and have reached out to the organisers to build on this action.

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## SPSC CAMPAIGN HIGHLIGHTS



The Jewish National Fund (JNF) serves as a global fundraiser for Israeli ethnic cleansing, occupation and apartheid. Despite this role in institutionalised racism and apartheid, the JNF enjoys charitable status in over 50 countries including Scotland!

This comes with financial privileges including tax relief, Canada has led the way by revoking this status, the [regulator in Scotland](#) (OSCR) must do the same.

It has been [STUC policy since 2012](#) to campaign to have charitable status revoked.

[WRITE TO OSCR](#)



Signatures continue to be added to our [Statement of Solidarity with Palestinian Workers](#) these will soon be published on the website. Have you signed yet?

[SIGN THE PETITION](#)



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# THE PALESTINIAN STRUGGLE: A WORKERS ISSUE

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## GET IN TOUCH:

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