

THE PALESTINIAN STRUGGLE: A WORKERS ISSUE

Scottish PSC Trade Union Network Newsletter | January 2026

THIS MONTH: SUPPORT THE HUNGER STRIKERS - INTERVIEW WITH ERIK HELGESON - TEVA PHARMA - TESCO BDS ACTION - TU AFFILIATIONS



Photo: Getty Images

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EDITORIAL: UNIONS MUST SUPPORT THE HUNGER STRIKERS



Photo: Getty Images

Political prisoners on hunger strike are challenging counter-terror laws and the criminalisation of Palestinian solidarity. Their struggle calls for the unconditional solidarity of trade unionists.

At Scottish PSC, we welcome the RMT Union call for the government to immediately intervene, as the prisoners are now in a severe state of malnutrition, with serious concerns about their health, welfare, and the duty of care responsibilities of the authorities. RMT General Secretary Eddie Dempsey said:

“The government must immediately intervene to protect the lives of hunger strikers taking action in support of Palestine. Regardless of the allegations against these individuals, the authorities have a clear obligation to ensure humane treatment and to protect life. These are fundamental principles of justice in Britain, that must be upheld at all times. The government must act now to protect lives and meet the prisoners’ legal representatives without delay.”

RMT Union has committed to work alongside the wider trade union movement to press the government to uphold its responsibility to ensure that human rights are fully respected.

What is your union saying or doing to support these heroic actions? Demand that your union follows the lead of the RMT. [SIGN HERE](#) to demand that David Lammy intervenes!

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STANDING TOGETHER: INSIDE THE SWEDISH DOCK WORKERS MOVEMENT WITH ERIK HELGESON

Last November, Scottish PSC Edinburgh Branch members, journalist Gabi Nogueira and SPSC TU Officer Hussein Ezzedine, conducted a fascinating interview with Erik Helgeson, Vice-Chair of the Swedish Dockworkers' Union (SDU). Their powerful conversation is essential viewing for Scottish trade unionists and is [**now fully available on our YouTube channel.**](#)



Photo: Arbetet Journal/Personal Archivel

“Even if members see party politics in a certain way, they are able to act in solidarity on other issues”

Erik Helgeson

Hussein Ezzedine
Scottish PSC TU Officer
Edinburgh Branch

For more than half a century, the Swedish Dock Workers Union (SDU) has occupied a distinctive place in the Nordic labour movement. Independent, democratic, and unaffiliated with any political party, the union has consistently combined workplace organising with international solidarity.

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Speaking with SDU Vice-Chair Erik Helgeson reveals how a relatively small union of dockworkers has managed to exert influence far beyond Sweden's ports, often in ways that surprise both employers and politicians.

SDU was founded in 1972 after dockworkers were expelled from the General Transport Union for opposing centralisation. "Negotiators were going to be appointed instead of elected, and locals were merged into big regions," Helgeson explains. "That meant less democracy, less control for members, and dockworkers simply refused to accept it." With support from southern ports, workers established a new union built on direct democracy. Members elect negotiators, vote on bargaining outcomes, and decide collectively on industrial action. "That structure isn't symbolic," Helgeson says. "It shapes everything we do."

Today, SDU organises workers in around 20 ports across Sweden, including Gothenburg, Stockholm and Malmö. "We're still unaffiliated with any political party, and that's quite rare in the Nordic context," Helgeson notes. "It means people don't have to share the same ideology to act together. The union is a workplace tool, not a party organisation."

That internal democracy has been especially important when addressing international issues. "A union can act on principle while keeping democratic traditions intact," Helgeson argues. "Members might disagree strongly on party politics, but they can still come together around human rights and solidarity."

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International action has long been part of SDU's identity. In 2010, members volunteered to support the flotilla attempting to break the Gaza blockade. After Israeli forces intercepted the flotilla and civilians were killed, SDU imposed a ten-day blockade of Israeli cargo. During the 2014 Gaza conflict, however, the union deliberately chose a slower, more inclusive approach. "This time, the initiative came from members," Helgeson says. "We debated it carefully, and then we let the whole membership decide."

Following a national referendum, 68 per cent voted to block Israeli military shipments. Helgeson is clear about the limits of such action. "Practically, it's extremely difficult to stop military imports or exports without full state co-operation," he says. "But that doesn't mean it's meaningless." The blockade helped bring Sweden's military trade into the national conversation, challenging assumptions about where arms exports go and why. "We moved the needle in public debate," Helgeson adds. "That matters, even if the action itself is largely symbolic."

Taking such a public stance came at a personal cost. Helgeson was later dismissed by his employer, who cited national security legislation and accused him of disloyalty. "It was surreal," he says. "These laws are meant to deal with spies and terrorists, not trade union spokespersons." The fact that a police report was filed before he was informed of his dismissal reinforced his view that the process was premeditated. "They want to break the union," Helgeson adds. "My case was just one part of a long-term strategy."

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Despite ongoing legal pressure and media scrutiny, Helgeson insists the union remains resilient. “The threat became mostly procedural,” he explains. “It’s exhausting, and it costs money, but it hasn’t stopped people from organising.” Dockworkers, he says, have a deeply ingrained culture of defiance. “If you tell us to go right, we go left. That’s always been part of dock work.”

For Helgeson, the implications extend far beyond Sweden. “Large unions can act too,” he says, “but only if pressure comes from below.” Leading by example, he argues, is more effective than endless internal debate. Even small unions can demonstrate what is legally possible, opening space for others to follow. “That’s how it worked with South Africa,” he notes. “It didn’t happen overnight, but it moved.”

SDU’s longevity, Helgeson believes, comes down to trust in democratic process. Members hold widely different political and religious views, including some who strongly support Israel. “People can say, ‘I voted no,’ and still stay in the union,” he says. “You don’t leave your union because you lose one vote. It’s your tool at work.”

Helgeson rejects the idea of dockworkers as heroic martyrs. What protects workers who take risks, he insists, is not admiration but replication. “If we’re isolated, we’ll be crushed,” he says. “If actions spread, repression becomes much harder.”

Solidarity, in this sense, is not about praise or symbolic support. Letters of support are nice, Helgeson acknowledges, but they are not enough.

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Real protection comes when similar actions are taken elsewhere, by other workers, in their own workplaces. “Don’t wait for a perfect plan,” he says. “Prioritise, act, and learn.”

Ultimately, Helgeson sees no separation between workers’ rights and human rights. “If some people are treated as less than human,” he comments, “trade union rights will disappear too.” Solidarity is therefore not moral symbolism but collective self-defence, a way of defending the conditions that make democratic organising possible at all.

“If actions spread,” he repeats, “it becomes much harder to silence anyone.”



DEFEND TRADE UNION RIGHTS - SUPPORT ERIK HELGESON!

WORKERS *in* PALESTINE

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ASLEF: A FULLY AFFILIATED UNION



Hussein Ezzedine
Scottish PSC TU Officer
Edinburgh Branch

*Recently retired ASLEF member**

There is only one trade union affiliated to Scottish PSC at British, Scottish, and branch level. It is the union I have been a member of for over 35 years: ASLEF, the train drivers' union. We should ask ourselves why this is the case.

ASLEF represents virtually all mainline train drivers, yet it has no control over who is recruited into those roles, that decision lies entirely with the employers. So are railway companies deliberately recruiting people predisposed to solidarity with Palestine? Clearly not. If that were the case, they would be doing a poor job, as there remain plenty of reactionary elements within the membership who are hostile to progressive policies!

Is there something about sitting at the front of a train that makes someone more likely to adopt an internationalist outlook than workers in other industries? To an extent, yes—but not for mystical reasons. Members of a strong trade union experience the advantages of collective action firsthand. That experience makes them more likely to understand and value solidarity, including international solidarity.

Strong unions and support for international solidarity should go hand in hand

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ASLEF: A FULLY AFFILIATED UNION



ASLEF General Secretary Mick Whelan speaking at a Palestine solidarity demo

My experience is that it only takes a very small number of committed activists who consciously integrate solidarity with Palestine into their workplace organising to begin shifting the balance. When international solidarity is treated not as an add-on but as part of everyday trade union activity, the dial can and does move. I have been fortunate to have had the support of a committed core of fellow Scottish activists who understand this.

ASLEF is far from perfect. Affiliation alone is not action, and the union must do far more to enact the BDS policies it has long held. Nonetheless, the positive example of how groundwork can be laid for more effective worker action is one others should follow.

ASLEF is not unique. Similar progress can be achieved in any union and any workplace, and it doesn't take more than a handful of committed organisers.

If we can do it, you can do it too:

- Put an affiliation motion to your Branch / Region / District
- Send an affiliation motion to your National AGM / Conference

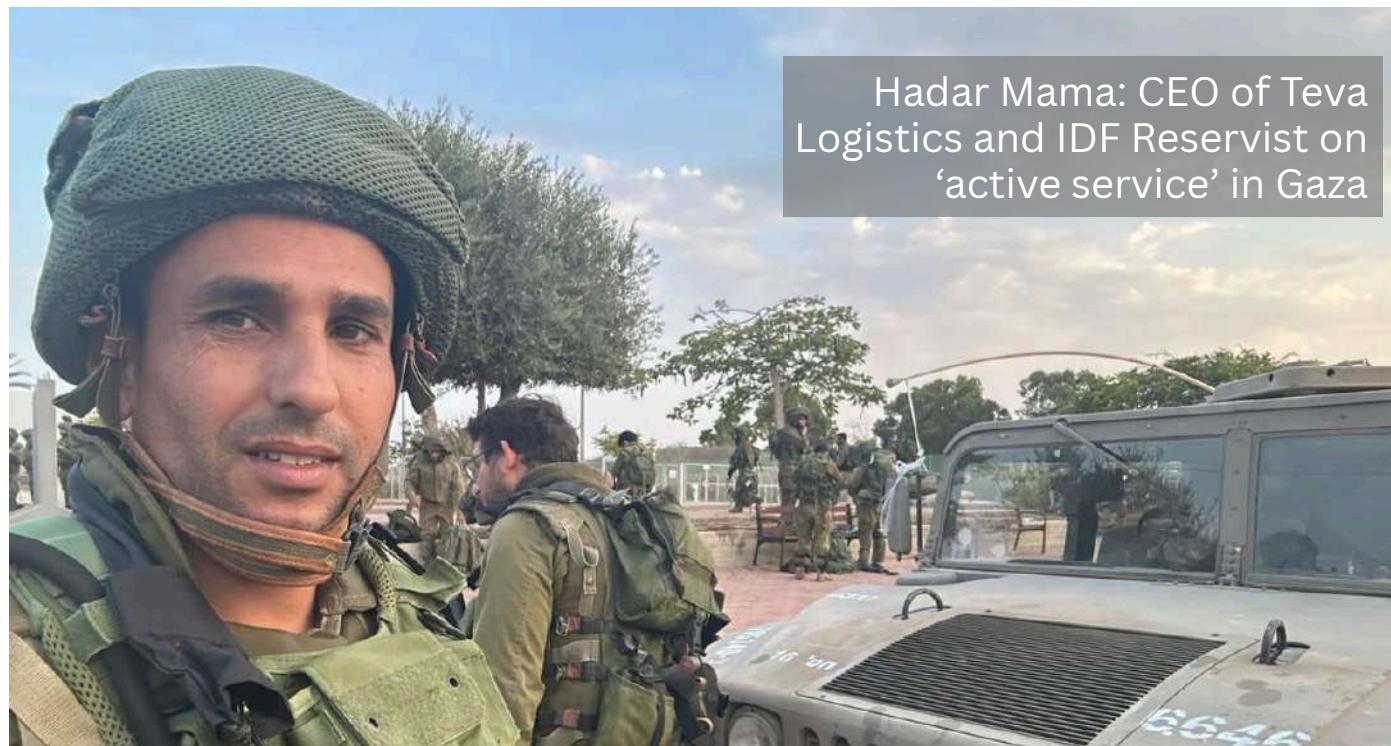
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TEVA PHARMACEUTICALS: NHS SCOTLAND'S SHAME



Hadar Mama: CEO of Teva Logistics and IDF Reservist on 'active service' in Gaza

**Scottish Healthcare Worker
from Edinburgh**

Teva Pharmaceuticals and the Ethical Considerations in NHS Scotland Procurement

Teva Pharmaceuticals Ltd is a multinational pharmaceutical company headquartered in Israel and one of the world's largest manufacturers of generic medicines. It is a significant supplier to NHS Scotland, accounting for approximately 15% of prescriptions. Many NHS staff and patients may not be aware that the company has strong links to the Israeli state and military and has benefited from the economic conditions created by the occupation of Palestinian territory. For these reasons, Teva has been highlighted by the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign.

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TEVA PHARMACEUTICALS: NHS SCOTLAND'S SHAME

As healthcare workers, our primary professional responsibility is to preserve life, alleviate suffering, and uphold the ethical principles that guide medical practice. We believe it is professionally and ethically appropriate for NHS Scotland to minimise reliance on products from companies whose conduct raises serious ethical and human-rights concerns, while ensuring patient care is never compromised. Clinically equivalent alternatives should be considered wherever they are available, so that patient treatment remains safe, continuous, and effective.

The destruction of healthcare infrastructure, targeting of health workers, and restrictions on medical supplies in Gaza have caused severe humanitarian harm. Leading international legal experts, UN agencies, and the Scottish Government have recognised the grave breaches of international humanitarian law. This humanitarian context highlights the importance of ensuring that public procurement policies are aligned with human-rights principles and ethical business practices.

We call on the Scottish Government to strengthen Scottish Procurement Policy to ensure that human-rights and ethical considerations are central to due diligence, in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. NHS Scotland and other public bodies should be empowered to review contracts with suppliers implicated in serious ethical or legal breaches and to prioritise clinically equivalent alternatives when appropriate. This would uphold the ethical standards of the NHS, protect public trust, and ensure that procurement aligns with the values of dignity, fairness, and accountability.

Teva's broader corporate record raises additional concerns. In 2023, the company reached a settlement with the US Department of Justice following an investigation into price-fixing, and in 2024, it was fined by the European Commission for anticompetitive practices relating to patent abuse.

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TEVA PHARMACEUTICALS: NHS SCOTLAND'S SHAME

These cases demonstrate a pattern of unlawful conduct across multiple jurisdictions. While these matters are separate from immediate clinical care, they are relevant to ethical procurement decisions. Trade unions in Scotland have an important role in supporting ethical procurement, raising awareness, and engaging constructively with NHS Scotland's governance structures.

Unions also provide protection for staff who raise legitimate ethical concerns, allowing collective action without exposing individual workers to professional risk. We encourage trade unions and the STUC to support these principles and to advocate for NHS Scotland to review contracts with Teva and consider alternative suppliers where clinically equivalent options exist, always keeping patient welfare central.

By aligning procurement with ethical standards and human-rights considerations, NHS Scotland can ensure that professional integrity is maintained, and public trust in the NHS is upheld.



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FROM MARY MANNING TO THE MOURNE MOUNTAINS

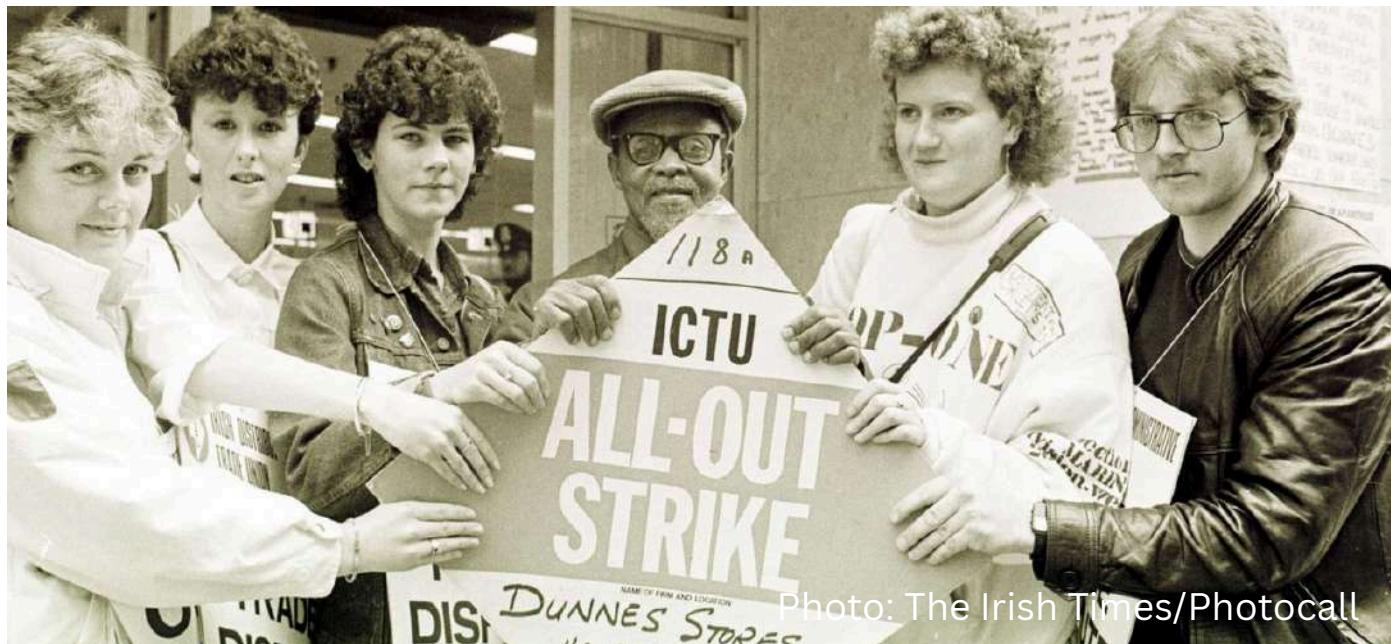


Photo: The Irish Times/Photocall

Kerris Duffy

Scottish PSC Supermarkets Campaign Officer

Edinburgh Branch

On Sunday 14th of December, activists in Edinburgh and Perth joined the call from BDS Groups in Ireland to stand in solidarity with a Tesco worker in Newcastle, a coastal town at the foot of the Mourne Mountains in County Down.

The call came after the worker who wishes to remain anonymous was suspended, pending disciplinary action for refusing to handle goods from Israel. Their principled stand echoes a powerful moment in Irish history when in 1984, Dunnes Stores Dublin worker Mary Manning refused to handle South African grapefruits. This sparked the Dunnes Stores strike lasting more than two years and helping shift global opinion against apartheid in South Africa.

This Tesco worker's action is part of a steadily growing workers boycott movement. Earlier this year staff action at Glasgow Film Theatre successfully removed coca-cola products from their bar due to the company having factories in illegal Israeli settlements.

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FROM MARY MANNING TO THE MOURNE MOUNTAINS

Dock workers across Europe have also been refusing to load cargo intended for Israel. We stand in full solidarity to all these workers. History has taught us that a single act of conscience becomes a ripple that can begin a larger wave of change. In this instance, a complete boycott of all Israeli goods in every supermarket store.

On the National Day of Action against Tesco stores across Ireland and the British Isles, we joined thousands who are taking a stand for justice, workers' rights, and international solidarity not only with the Tesco worker but also with the people of Palestine. We honour the courage of those who refuse to be complicit, and we reaffirm our belief that ordinary workers, acting together, can help change the course of history. In a statement read by BDS Belfast on behalf of the anonymous worker they explained the reasoning for their actions.

*“Tesco says and I quote: that customers still expect us to serve them well, however, they also recognise that we are a part of society and we can make a positive difference, contributing to the wider world too. We champion what matters to our colleagues and customers, caring about the communities where they live and our planet. I am a colleague, I am a member of the community. I am a customer and I also care about our planet. That's why I decided to act on my conscience. I call on Tesco to do the same. **STOP HANDLING ISRAELI GOODS!**”*

Stand in solidarity with this Tesco worker:

- Follow [@tescoworkercampaign](https://twitter.com/tescoworkercampaign)
- Sign [the petition](https://www.change.org/p/tesco-stop-handling-israeli-goods)
- Join SPSC and get involved in our supermarkets campaign
- Contact me for more information on the campaign and how to get involved in your local area:
kerrisd@scottishpalestinesolidaritycampaign.org

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SPSC CAMPAIGN 2025 HIGHLIGHT

STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINIAN WORKERS

The SPSC Trade Union working group's Statement of Solidarity with Palestinian Workers expresses our unwavering solidarity with our comrades in Palestine.

Signatories understand that the Palestinian struggle is part of a broader struggle for freedom, equality and justice, and that the liberation of oppressed people is inextricably linked to the struggles of workers in Scotland and elsewhere.

The list of signatories who have agreed to have their names made public was published in November, names continue to be added – have you added yours?

Signatory Organisations:

Iver Bimson, on behalf of RMT

John Dennis, Dumfries, on behalf of Dumfries & Galloway TU Council

Derek Durkin, Edinburgh, on behalf of Trade Unions In Communities

Hussein Ezzedine, on behalf of ASLEF Edinburgh nº 1 Branch

Sylvia Haughney, Falkirk, on behalf of UNISON

Ruth Horsfall, Edinburgh, on behalf of PCS Scottish Government Group

Alicia Kopiej, Kirkcaldy, on behalf of Unite Community Tayside and Fife

Babs Macgregor, Glasgow, on behalf of Co-Op Workers

Robert Wicksted, on behalf of ASLEF Edinburgh nº 2 Branch

Esmond Sage, Aberdeen, on behalf of UNISON Aberdeen City branch

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STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINIAN WORKERS

Signatories in a Personal Capacity:

Tony Adams, Glasgow EIS and NUJ
Sarah Alam, Glasgow, Unite the Union
Charlie Allanson-Oddy, Edinburgh, Unite and IWW
Jamie Bolland, Glasgow, Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS)
Chr Brennan, Shotts, Unite
Maria Brichs, Edinburgh, Unison
Laurie Byrne Rains, Dundee, Unite
David Cannon, London, Unite the Union
Tony-Peter Carter, Fraserburgh, Unison
Carole Clohesy, Huntly, NEU
Maggie Chapman, Aberdeen, Unite the Union
Allan Connal, Cumbernauld, GMB
Andy Crichton, Ladybank, Unite Community
Kimberley Davidson, Innerleithen, Unison
Jane Davidson, Edinburgh, Unison
Emma Donnelly, Glasgow, Unite Hospitality Glasgow
CarolAnne Duncan, Glasgow, EIS
Derek Durkin, Edinburgh, Unite
Erin Farley, Dundee, Unison
David Hainey, Motherwell, RMT & North Lanarkshire TU Council
Tony Hickie, Aberdeen, PCSU (retired)
Naomi Junnor, Glasgow, Unison
Theresa Keenan, Glasgow, Unite the Union
Ailiki Kalliopi Chiotaki, Edinburgh, Unison
Lindsay Giffen, Campbeltown, Unison
Stuart Graham, Glasgow, Unison
Peter Gunn, Glasgow, Retired
Sharon Iddir, Dunfermline, EIS
Susan Kelly, Edinburgh, Unite the Union
David Kirkwood, Wishaw, UNITE
Louise Kowalska, Edinburgh, PCS Scottish Government Group
John Robertson, Glasgow, Unison
James Lafferty, Motherwell, ASLEF

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Helen Leaver, Edinburgh, Retired
Jim Lister, Glasgow, Unite the Union
James McCabe, Bo'ness, Unison NHS Retired member.
Tara McCarthy, Prestonpans, Unison
Deborah MacFadyen, Glasgow, Unison
David MacFadyen, Glasgow, Unison
Rene McDonald, Glasgow, NUJ
Eve Macdonald, Edinburgh, Accord
Katherine McGowan, Dingwall, Unison
Sara McGregor, Newburgh, Unison
Mhairi McKean, Glasgow, Unison and Unite
John McKenzie, Duns, FBU
Craig Maclean, Edinburgh, NUJ
Kathie Mclean Toremar, Dunoon, Unison
Jeff McDermott, St Andrews, Unison
Donald McKenzie, Edinburgh, Unison
James McSporran, Lochgilphead, RCN
Chris Main, St Andrews, Unite Retired Members
Jim Malone, Dundee, FBU
Alan Marshall, Glasgow, Unite West Scotland Community Branch
Juliet Molteno, Alva, Unison
Peter Moonie, Bonnyrigg, UNISON
Douglas Murdoch, Dunbar, Unite (unemployed member)
Aisa Nebreda, Ardrishaig, Unison
Gabriel Neil, Dunfermline, PCS
Lia Nogueira, Peterhead, Unison
Annie Ogletree, Edinburgh, Unison Retired member
Charley O'Hear, Paisley, Unison
Alec Ohnstad, Lochgilphead, NASUWT
Peter Olech, Edinburgh, Unite Edinburgh Community

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STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINIAN WORKERS

Morven Ovenstone-Jones, Fife, SSTA
W M Oswald, Glasgow, Unite the Union
Alex Pandolfo, Morecambe, UCU retired members
John Pinto, Edinburgh, UCU
Mark Rivers, Macduff, BECTU (Prospect)
Anna Robertson, Aberdeen, PCS
Kevin Robertson, Falkirk, Unite the Union
Martin James Rushford, Kilmarnock, Unison
Damian Sefton, Edinburgh, UNISON
Eileen Simpson, Edinburgh, EIS
Stephen Smellie, Hamilton, Unison
Fiona Stoddart, Glasgow, Unite
Colin Sutherland, Unison
Iain Trotter, Dumfries, RMT
Tom Worthington, BECTU
Lesedi Vine, Edinburgh, Unite the Union
Anne Marie Woods, Belfast, NEU
Jurgen Wolf, Cairnbaan, retired member
Marion Young, Motherwell, TSSA retired

As trade unionists in Scotland, we must show unwavering solidarity with our Palestinian colleagues in their struggle for freedom, equality and justice, for the liberation of all oppressed peoples are inextricably linked workers' struggles in Scotland and around the world.

Our [**Statement of Solidarity with Palestinian Workers**](#) has now been published on the website; signatures can still be added.

SIGN THE STATEMENT

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GET IN TOUCH

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