Workers in Palestine have emphasized the need for targeted actions against the production and transportation of arms to Israel, recognizing the potential to significantly impact Israel's war machine. In turn, activists have effectively organized pickets and blockades at arms factories, along with actions at ports to halt arms shipments. These experiences offer valuable lessons for current and future actions on how to effectively collaborate with workers and trade unions to maximize impact on the arms trade.

In this info sheet, we break down some of the key organizing lessons from these actions. The goal is to help community activists organize with workers and trade unions to strengthen our collective ability to disrupt business as usual.

1) INITIAL RESEARCH

Phase one involves conducting initial research to gather crucial information about the factory. This includes identifying what the factory produces, the specific parts it manufactures, existing contracts, the number of workers, and their union affiliation (if available).

Understanding these details is essential as it provides a solid foundation for further action. It enables activists to devise effective strategies for engagement with workers. Having comprehensive information enhances the credibility of the campaign and strengthens efforts by demonstrating a thorough understanding of the workplace issues in the factory itself.

2) MESSAGING SHOULD BE INCLUSIVE AND WELCOMING TO WORKERS.

Engaging with workers is critical as they hold the power to shut down the assembly line from within the factory, making our efforts significantly more effective.

Messaging – whether online, in person or in campaign materials – accusing workers of complicity in Israel's actions is not only unlikely to garner new supporters but may actually play into the hands of the employer and the Israeli state. Phrases like 'you have blood on your hands' will shut down possibilities for meaningful coalition building with workers.

Instead, a much more effective message focuses on the *employer's* complicity and invites workers to join the campaign, emphasising their unique leverage with their employer.
3) CAMPAIGN MATERIALS SHOULD BE FOCUSED AND PRECISE: LESS IS MORE!

Activists often feel obligated to communicate a great deal of background information on the history and contemporary facts of Israel’s oppression of Palestinians in their outreach efforts. However, the reality is that most workers will be interested primarily in understanding how their employer is complicit and what they can do about it.

Campaign materials should therefore be focused on getting across key facts about what is being produced in the factory; how these goods are being used by Israel; what the objective of the campaign is (i.e., ending the contract with Israel); and how workers can get involved. More in-depth information on Israel’s ongoing genocide in Gaza and settler-colonial regime is better conveyed through off-site educational events and the like, which can form a component of an ongoing campaign.

If the workers’ union, or a group within the union, has taken a positive stand on Palestine, it is helpful to make that clear in campaign materials. Please also consider linking the issue of Palestine with other related areas where the union has a strong record of activism, such as anti-racism or opposition to the country’s foreign policy.

Finally, be sure to include a clear ‘ask’ in campaign materials. For example, you could encourage workers to speak to their managers about reassigning them off arms work or to contact their union to take a position on this with management. The particular ‘ask’ will depend on the specifics of the given workplace (see #9 below on developing an effective strategy).

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4) WORK WITH ‘BRIDGE BUILDERS’ TO DEVELOP EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGNS.

‘Bridge builders’ are trade union members, activists or leaders who are sympathetic to the campaign and willing to work with community activists, on the one hand, and their fellow workers, on the other, to ensure the campaign’s success. Bridge builders are key resources for understanding the ins and outs of the employer, the workplace and the union and will often have inside info to share on arms contracts that will be useful for the campaign.

It is therefore worth putting substantial time and effort into forging strong relationships with bridge builders as this is typically a ‘make or break’ factor for campaign success. To begin, draw on existing activist networks, including contacts in the local trade union movement, to identify and make introductions to potential allies in the arms factory.

It’s important to establish respectful, two-way communication from the outset: your specific campaign goals and tactics should be developed in conversation with bridge builders, not imposed on them. They will have privileged insights into what is likely to be most effective at a given worksite, including formulating demands, developing campaign materials, carrying out outreach, and deciding upon when and how to take action.

IT IS THEREFORE WORTH PUTTING SUBSTANTIAL TIME AND EFFORT INTO FORGING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH BRIDGE BUILDERS AS THIS IS TYPICALLY A ‘MAKE OR BREAK’ FACTOR FOR CAMPAIGN SUCCESS.
5) FORMULATE CLEAR, CONCRETE AND ACHIEVABLE DEMANDS.

Organising is most effective when it is focused on clearly-defined demands that directly connect work happening at the arms factory with Israel’s violence against Palestinians. The Who Arms Israel toolkit is a good starting point for researching potential connections; however, bridge-builders are likely to have useful ‘insider information’ that may not be publicly available.

Generally speaking, workers are more likely to respond to campaigns focused on narrow demands targeting contracts with Israel than broader demands focusing on arms production as a whole, particularly when contracts with Israel do not account for a large share of total employment. More focused campaigns are also more likely to have achievable goals which can increase the confidence and commitment of both trade union and community activists.

6) ANTICIPATE AND PREPARE TO SPEAK TO WORKER CONCERNS BY ROLE-PLAYING SCENARIOS WITH SUPPORTERS AHEAD OF TIME.

Managers in many plants have been actively trying to stop community activists from engaging with workers, and speaking against the campaign at work. It’s clear that managers are nervous about the presence of community activists and that our campaign is having an impact. But for this same reason, it’s really important that we get these opportunities to have conversations with workers right from the beginning.

Community activists are typically well-prepared to speak to the history and situation on the ground in Palestine. However, workers may be more focused on a different set of concerns, in particular regarding the impact on their employment of the campaign. Workers and community supporters may also have questions or concerns about the potential legal consequences of various tactics. It is important to anticipate these concerns ahead of time and be prepared to respond.
Work with bridge builders and do research ahead of time that can speak to these issues. For example:

- Which arms is the factory involved in producing for Israel?
- What is the financial value of their Israeli contract(s)?
- How many workers in the factory are tied to these jobs?
- Is it possible for these workers to be moved to other roles in the plant?

It may not be possible to find answers to all of these questions in advance, but the more information you have, the better.

Role-playing scenarios with activists who will be involved in outreach makes for far more effective organising conversations, as do regular debriefs on what is working well and what isn’t. Be sure to continually update key organisers as additional information becomes known through conversations with workers or other means.

7) DEVELOP AND DEMONSTRATE AN UNDERSTANDING OF OTHER WORKPLACE ISSUES TO BUILD TRUST AND RAPPORT WITH WORKERS.

Strong relationships between community activists and workers are built on true mutuality. That means focusing not just on what workers can do for Palestine but what community activists can do to support workers. Work with bridge builders to develop an initial understanding of key workplace issues and build on this through conversations with workers while leafletting.

Demonstrating real knowledge of the situation in the factory, including non-Palestine related issues, as community activists will go a long way to building trust.

Even more importantly, be on the lookout for opportunities to show up for the union when support is needed, i.e., during industrial action or other campaigns. Inquiring about such opportunities can be especially helpful in building relationships with union reps.
8) EFFECTIVE OUTREACH TO WORKERS IS ABOUT QUALITY, NOT QUANTITY.

Building meaningful organising relationships with workers takes time and patience, as well as preparation and commitment. If the first time workers see you or become aware of your campaign is through a mass demonstration outside the factory, this is unlikely to form the ground of a strong collaborative relationship.

Instead, build from the ground up with a small group of activists who are well-prepared to have in-depth organising conversations with workers, including fielding difficult questions and concerns. Wherever possible, ask bridge-builders to assist in outreach as workers are far more likely to respond positively to co-workers or union reps than to outsiders.

It's important to note that some workers may be wary of speaking to activists in the immediate vicinity of the workplace where they can be observed by managers, union reps or other workers. If workers are willing to speak with you at another time, take down their contact info and offer to speak by phone or in person away from the workplace, i.e., at a coffee shop. (For the same reason, plan any in-person organising meetings at locations where workers can feel comfortable, i.e., at someone’s home or in a community meeting space if appropriate.)

You can also list a contact on any materials you hand out and invite workers to get in touch – but please be sure to list an actual named human with a phone number, ideally a bridge builder from the union/workplace, rather than an anonymous email address, as this will strongly increase the likelihood of workers getting in touch.

BUILD FROM THE GROUND UP WITH A SMALL GROUP OF ACTIVISTS WHO ARE WELL-PREPARED TO HAVE IN-DEPTH ORGANISING CONVERSATIONS WITH WORKERS, INCLUDING FIELDING DIFFICULT QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS. WHEREVER POSSIBLE, ASK BRIDGE-BUILDERS TO ASSIST IN OUTREACH AS WORKERS ARE FAR MORE LIKELY TO RESPOND POSITIVELY TO CO-WORKERS OR UNION REPS THAN TO OUTSIDERS.

9) WORK WITH BRIDGE-BUILDERS TO UNDERSTAND LEVERAGE POINTS AND DEVELOP A CLEAR ESCALATION STRATEGY FOR INCREASING PRESSURE ON THE COMPANY OVER TIME.

The order in which different actions take place is an important component of campaign success.

Within the union branch structure, it is useful to establish positions, for example, through passing union branch motions to provide a mandate for organising and a mandate for union reps to raise the issue with management. When proceeding with workplace actions like demonstrations, pickets and blockades consider the sequencing of these actions, ensuring that actions outside the workplace support and strengthen the organizing efforts happening within, rather than inadvertently causing harm.
Research into the specificities of the workplace and employer will provide insights into the most effective forms of leverage.

For example:

- If an employer is seeking City Council approval for expansion, targeting the Council to deny approval may prove effective.
- If workers are given the choice of whether to work on civil or defense contracts (which may be particularly relevant for university partnerships on research and development), developing a campaign to get workers to commit en masse to only working on civil contracts until arms contracts with Israel are ended may be a promising strategy.
- If you are given information about timings for an arms shipment leaving the factory for Israel, a blockade can be planned for that day.

The point is that there is no ‘one size fits all’ model. Effective strategy is developed in relation to the specificities of the given workplace and employer.

10) COMMUNITY PICKET LINES GENERALLY REQUIRE OVERWHELMING NUMBERS TO BE EFFECTIVE.

While this info sheet has primarily focused on the ‘worker side’ of arms industry organising, it is crucial that activists not neglect the ‘community side’.

This is particularly true if community picket lines or blockades are envisioned as a key tactic as their effectiveness depends on creating a large enough physical barrier to workers entry which likewise may provide legal protection for workers to refuse to enter the workplace. This is very important in countries like the US and UK where political strikes are unlawful.

However, even in cases where community picket lines or blockades are not envisioned, workers gain confidence to engage in campaigns when they know that community members have their backs and are there supporting them with their time, resources, networks and know-how.
Organising ‘big enough’ community picket lines and/or blockades, especially outside of urban areas, is all about community outreach and logistics.

Be sure to exhaust all networks of potential community supporters in your area and consider how they will reach the worksite. If public transportation is scarce, consider organising buses or ride shares (and be prepared for the time and effort required!) If actions are likely to be called at short notice (i.e., to block an arms shipment leaving the factory), it is sensible to set up a text alert system by gathering contact information ahead of time and preparing supporters to be ready to take action quickly.

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