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“Retire Genocide!” Say Los Angeles Teachers



Image courtesy UNRWA.

Rank and file teachers in the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) are mobilizing to demand their pension fund—CalSTRS—divest from Israel’s genocide in Palestine, sell off investments in immigrant surveillance and quit the war economy altogether. CalSTRS, the second largest public pension fund in the United States, invests over a billion dollars of its \$352 billion portfolio in corporations that teachers say commit grave human rights violations not only in the US, where Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) abducts protesters in broad daylight, but also in Palestine and throughout a Middle East under bombardment.

Divest from scholasticide

“CalSTRS invests in weapons companies that have destroyed 90% of Gaza’s schools and all twelve of its universities,” says retired LAUSD teacher and UTLA member Kathleen Hernandez. “As educators, we cannot be complicit in the obliteration of schools and universities. This crime of scholasticide violates international law enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that affirms the right to an education. If we care about education, about students, about future generations, we must protect children and their families.”

This week teachers across the Los Angeles Unified School District joined with LA Educators for Justice in Palestine (LAEJP) in hopes of passing a UTLA House of Representatives motion that puts the second largest US teachers union, 35,000 teachers strong, on record “publicly calling on CalSTRS to immediately adopt and abide by an Ethical Investment Policy Statement that guides CalSTRS to divest from assets and companies that consistently and directly profit from, enable or facilitate human rights violations, violations of international law, prolonged military occupations, apartheid, or genocide.”

LA Educators for Justice in Palestine, a diverse multiethnic group within UTLA that includes Jewish anti-Zionist teachers, objects to CalSTRS investments in companies singled out in the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) publication “Companies Profiting from the Gaza Genocide” as described below:

THE BOEING COMPANY

CalSTRS investment: \$198, 608, 000

Boeing manufactures F-15 fighter jets and Apache AH-64 attack helicopters, for Israeli Air Force bombardment of Gaza and Lebanon.

CATERPILLAR INC.

CalSTRS investment: \$213,827,000

For decades, Caterpillar has been supplying Israel with giant armored bulldozers, which the Israeli military operates to illegally demolish thousands of Palestinian homes and civilian infrastructure in the occupied West Bank and to enforce the blockade of water, food, fuel and medicine to the Gaza Strip.

ELBIT SYSTEMS

CalSTRS investment: \$3,992,000

Israel’s largest weapons manufacturer, Elbit Systems supplies weapons and surveillance systems to the Israeli military, including large missile-carrying drones to attack Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon. Designed for use in “densely populated urban warfare, Elbit’s 500-pound multi-purpose bombs contain 26,000 controlled fragments for “high kill probability.

**L3HARRIS TECHNOLOGIES*

CalSTRS investment: \$70, 843,000

The world's ninth largest weapons manufacturer, [L3Harris](#) manufactures components that are integrated into multiple weapons systems used by the Israeli military in Gaza, including [Boeing](#)'s JDAM kits, [Lockheed Martin](#)'s F-35 warplane, [Northrop Grumman](#)'s Sa'ar 5 warships

LOCKHEED MARTIN

CalSTRS investment: \$176, 868, 000 in stocks; \$24 million in bonds.

The world's largest weapons manufacturer, [Lockheed Martin](#) supplies Israel with F-16 and F-35 fighter jets to bomb Gaza. Israel also uses the company's C-130 Hercules transport planes to support the ground invasion of Gaza

MAERSK

CalSTRS investment: \$22, 316,000

Maersk transports military cargo to Israel and is the target of the Palestinian Youth Movement's Mask Off Maersk campaign.

NORTHROP GRUMMAN

CalSTRS investment: \$108, 705,000

The world's sixth largest weapons manufacturer, [Northrop Grumman](#) supplies the Israeli Air Force with the Longbow missile delivery system for its Apache attack helicopters and laser weapon delivery systems for its fighter jets. Northrop Grumman also contracts with the U.S. government to build nuclear weapons at least 20 times more lethal than the atomic bomb.

PALANTIR TECHNOLOGIES

CalSTRS investment: [\\$44,875,000](#)

Palantir supplies AI systems to Israel to track and strike targets in Gaza.

According to [Amnesty International](#), Palantir also supplies ICE with technology to arrest caregivers of unaccompanied minors, leading to detentions and [harming children's welfare](#). "Similarly, ICE relies on [Palantir technology](#) to plan mass raids that lead to [prolonged detention](#).

RTX (RAYTHEON)

CalSTRS investment: \$219, 660,000

The world's second largest weapons manufacturer and largest producer of guided missiles, [RTX](#) supplies the Israeli Air Force with guided air-to-surface missiles for its F-16 fighter jets, as well as cluster bombs and "bunker buster" bombs.

VALERO ENERGY

CalSTRS investment: \$95,000,000

Valero supplies jet fuel to Israel for military use.

A knock on the door—Know Your Rights

Seventy-three percent of the students in the Los Angeles Unified School District identify as Latino or Hispanic and, according to UTLA, 30,000 students are immigrants with one in four undocumented—data not lost on district educators whose students dread a knock on the door from ICE. In response, UTLA offers resources for the immigrant community, including Know Your Rights advice such as “Stay calm—Do not open the door—Do not sign any documents—Ask to speak with your lawyer or loved one.” The next step, say LAEJP teachers, is to remove the teachers’ monetary complicity with Palantir, Trumpian Peter Thiel’s data-analysis company that has raked in over a billion dollars in federal contracts for immigration enforcement.

“It is unacceptable to invest in institutions that have historically separated and attacked our Latino immigrant communities,” said one Los Angeles teacher who preferred to remain anonymous. “These companies are the same entities that pride themselves in decision dominance or superior decision-making, all the while executing decisions to undermine our student community—tearing children apart from their parents and criminalizing immigrant workers.”

Divest from settlements and Israel Bonds

Rank and file teachers also call on CalSTRS to sell off \$22 million in stock in Israel’s Bank Leumi, which has branches in a number of illegal West Bank settlements and provides private loans and mortgages to settlers. CalSTRS has held this stock since spring of 2024 when the Biden administration, three years into its term—still arming Israel’s slaughter in Gaza—imposed sanctions on illegal settlers, noting their settlements violated international law.

Bank Leumi also issues the State of Israel’s Jerusalem Bonds that fund Israel’s military operations. Despite Moody’s 2024 downgrading of investments in Israel, citing “material negative consequences for Israel’s creditworthiness in both the near and longer term,” the CalSTRS portfolio, posted on line, continues to show investments in Israeli companies and additional Israel bond issuers, such as the Israel Discount Bank.

Rank and file educators are not the only ones shouting “Sell off!” those Israel bonds. Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), the nation’s leading anti-Zionist Jewish organization, runs a “Break

the Bonds” campaign to encourage cities, counties, state governments and pension funds to ditch the loan business for genocide.

In March of 2023, as Israeli Finance Minister Smotrich—an unabashed proponent of ethnic cleansing and “moral” forced starvation—fundraised at the Israel Bonds conference at the Grand Hyatt in Washington DC. JVP rabbis and rabbinical students converged at the hotel’s atrium to transform it into a Beit Midrash (House of Study) to teach the “Torah of Divestment.” After security bounced them from the hotel, the rabbis and their students took the Torah of Divestment to the street to unfurl a banner proclaiming, “Apartheid is funded here.”

CalSTRS history of divestment

LA teachers involved in Retire Genocide! are part of a statewide CalSTRS Divest coalition that launched a petition campaign endorsed by chapters of CODEPINK, Jewish Voice for Peace, Students for Justice in Palestine and Democratic Socialists of America, as well as Bay Area teachers unions.

Advocates for divestment are optimistic.

LAEJP points to CalSTRS’ history of divestment from tobacco (2000), Iran (2007), firearms (2013), thermal coal (2016) and private immigrant detention centers (2018). Moreover, the effort to pass the current divestment resolution comes on the heels of UTLA overwhelmingly passing other resolutions by the union’s Human Rights Committee and Raza Educators to support reinstatement of Students for Justice in Palestine at UCLA, oppose legislation (AB 1468) to censor voices for Palestine in Ethnic Studies, and sever the district’s curriculum partnership with the Anti-Defamation League for smearing peace activists demanding an end to US-backed Israel genocide in Gaza.

The UTLA divestment motion urges the powerhouse 300,000 member California Teachers Association (CTA), the National Education Association (NEA), and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) to also support the call for divestment. Should UTLA back a divestment motion, the union would join the California Federation of Teachers, Oakland Education Association, United Teachers Richmond, and Berkeley Federation of Teachers in passing similar motions.

With UTLA rank and file on board, the chorus for divestment is about to become much louder and more urgent as Israel launches a new air and ground offensive against Gaza, where medics have coined the acronym WCNSF for “wounded child with no surviving family.”

“The thought of my pension money invested in this horror show—this live-streamed genocide— keeps me up at night,” says Laura Pinho, an LAUSD performing arts teacher who supervises a Students for Justice in Palestine club at her high school. Pinho donates money—”a backward paddle” to organizations helping Palestinian children harmed by CalSTRS investments. “I have a message for CalSTRS,” says the dance teacher who knows how to take a leap. “Divest our pension from surveillance, war and military occupation now.”

Marcy Winograd is a retired public high school teacher and literacy coach who taught English and social studies in the Los Angeles Unified School District. She is also the coordinator of CODEPINK Congress, a member of Jewish Voice for Peace and co-chair of the Central Coast Antiwar Coalition based in Santa Barbara, California.

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