

Slaughter funded with workers pensions and council tax

On 8th June, Israel killed 274 Palestinians in Nuseirat during a raid to rescue 4 hostages. Eyewitnesses spoke to *The Intercept*. When the bombs struck near his place in Nuseirat on Saturday, and Abu Nasser and his wife fled to the street, he was surprised to find so many ways to die: tanks, attack helicopters, shells, missiles, and, picking people off on the street, the drones with small arms attached. "People were running before our eyes, fleeing from the drones," Abu Nasser said. "And we hid in a place the drones couldn't reach. We were waiting for death, expecting the house to be bombed over our heads."

Some MPF holdings (Jun 2024)

Elbit Systems £51,744. Israel's largest arms firm. Components for F-35 jets. 59 UK military export licences since 2014. Skylark and Hermes military drones used extensively in Gaza, including attack which killed 7 aid workers. MPR 500 multi-purpose bombs designed for use in "densely populated urban warfare" with 26,000 controlled fragments for "high kill probability."

Lockheed Martin £119,722. World's biggest arms firm, US-based. 90% of annual revenue is military. Its F-16 and F-35 jets bomb Gaza, and Longbow Hellfire missiles used extensively since 2023. Many nuclear weapons contracts including submarine-launched Trident missiles for the US and UK.

RTX (Raytheon) £48,389. World's second-largest arms firm, US-based; 59% of revenue is military. 15 UK licences for military exports to Israel since 2008. Israel uses Raytheon missiles, cluster bombs and 5,000-pound "bunker buster" and laser-guided Paveway bombs. Saudi/UAE forces dropped a Raytheon Paveway on a pick-up truck full of Yemeni children and women in an agricultural area, shredding all 15 on board. Extensive US nuclear weapons contracts.

Honeywell £754,088. US-based, 30 UK licences for military exports to Israel. Missile guidance component found in June 2024 attack on UN school in Gaza. Components for F-35 jets. Collaborates with Israel Aerospace Industries on sensors for IAI's Heron drones, used over Gaza.

General Dynamics £1,141,201. World's 5th largest arms firm, US-based, 72% of revenue is military. Supplies Israel with guns for F-15, F-16, and F-35 jets, 5,000-lb "bunker buster" and "hardened penetration bombs" which can be attached to Paveway laser-guided bombs. Engines for Merkava IV tank used in Gaza now. UK & US Trident II (D5) nuclear weapons.

BAE Systems £7,369,666. World's 6th largest arms firm, UK-based, 97% of revenue is military. Collaborates with Lockheed Martin to manufacture F-35s and supply components. Partnered with Israeli firm Rafael on Typhoon gun system for drones enforcing Israel's illegal blockade of Gaza, firing on fishermen. Fined for corrupt international sales. Supplied over 200 combat aircraft to Saudi Arabia.

AP Moller-Maersk £69,568. Danish shipping and logistics giant. Transported over \$300 million in weapons components to U.S. arms firms since October. A quarter of known U.S. current shipments to Northrup Grumman, Woodward, RTX/Raytheon, and Lockheed Martin.



The Merseyside Pension Fund (MPF) implements the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) in our area. It provides pensions for council staff and others. Members of the Scheme contribute to the Fund, and draw a pension when they retire. Local authorities also contribute to the Fund – the BBC has estimated around 8% of Council Tax is used to finance the LGPS nationally. The MPF is administered by the Pensions Committee of Wirral Council, on behalf of all Merseyside Local Authorities.

The MPF invests £billions from these contributions to finance the pensions. A small percentage, around £80m is invested in 32 firms supplying the Israeli military either directly or via the US, and around £950k is invested in four Israeli banks supplying the illegal settlements on the occupied West Bank. Some of the arms firms also supply the Saudi regime. These investments contribute directly to the slaughter of civilians in Gaza and Yemen. Some firms also supply the US and UK nuclear weapons programmes. The MPF could easily divest with minimal impact on the total Fund.

We all want and demand a ceasefire, but these issues will remain. There have been at least 9 major Israeli attacks on Gaza since 2004.

Our campaign demands that the MPF divest from the identified arms firms and banks. We say that workers and Council Tax payers have every right to demand that their deferred wages and taxes are not used to slaughter civilians, prop up illegal colonies on occupied land, or supply weapons of mass destruction. ►

The Campaign so far

Our campaign for divestment is not an attack on workers pensions, the MPF or the contributions of Scheme members or local authorities to the Fund. It is aimed at the investment decisions taken by the Wirral Council Pensions Committee on behalf of all Merseyside local authorities. We have demonstrated outside Birkenhead Town Hall and Wallasey Town Hall, questioned the Pensions Committee and the Wirral Full Council AGM, and given information to Councillors. We need a massive campaign to win. One tactic is an online letter to the Pensions Committee at tinyurl.com/mpfform1 which can be amended when using the form.

Who supports the campaign?

Nationally, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Unison support LGPS divestment from complicit companies and banks. In the North West, the Unison Regional International Committee has supported our lobbies of the Wirral Pension Committee. Before the current war on Gaza, Unison North West issued an online letter mainly focused on the illegal settlements <https://survey.alchemer.eu/s3/90465702/Divest-our-Pension-Fund-from-Israeli-Occupation-Merseyside>. In March, Unison Regional Committee agreed to write to the Chairperson of the Wirral Pension Committee informing her of UNISON's policy.

Wirral TUC have taken up the campaign, and emailed all of their affiliates. Their publicity "Our Wages, Our Voices, Our Choices" is online at <http://labournet.net/ukunion/2402/Pension%20leaflet%202.pdf>

How has Wirral Pensions Committee responded?

Slowly, to put it mildly. In December, it decided to set up a Responsible Investment Working Party to develop "its responsible investment policy, climate change and stewardship activities. Under LGPS regulations and guidance, whilst the overriding duty of the Members of Pensions Committee is the pursuit of financial return within reasonable risk parameters in order to pay pensions, non-financial considerations may be taken into account provided that doing so would not involve significant risk of financial detriment to the scheme and where Members have good reason to think that scheme members would support their decision."

The Working Party met in February, and considered "an initial report on the defence industry", unpublished. In March, the Pensions Committee Chair Councillor Julie McManus (Labour) refused to take any questions on this matter. The new Chair is Councillor Brenda Hall, a member of UNISON.

How can we win?

We need a much bigger movement, reflecting the strength of public opinion on the Gaza genocide. When Councillors face thousands of Scheme members, trade unionists and Council Tax payers demanding divestment, it will be much harder to evade the issue. Many people will be shocked to learn the reality, if we can reach them. That requires both input from UNISON regionally, the active involvement of branches across the trade union movement, and pressure on Councillors from Council Tax payers across Merseyside. Some suggestions from our recent meeting:

- Quick facts and concise info for action, pragmatic steps, (not talking) something to take back as a Unison Black rep-tools I can use to mobilise and ensure a more representative campaign.
- A petition/letter for members of the fund to be circulated by reps/branch secretaries to mobilise and engage and get out the message to all Merseyside Pension Fund members in all of Merseyside.
- Lobby councillors and MPs-esp Liam Robinson LCC leader and Maria Eagle.
- Involve faith groups, include Lucas plan, campaign for alternative ethical investment, how to contact retired members with info, education sessions for union members, investigate non payment of council tax, council tax letter writing campaign.
- write to all union branches on Merseyside we can identify to ask if they would like a speaker. This needs a group of people ready to speak if invited.
- an online system for people to email the Pensions Committee chair.

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