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Reviews

Not a Cause for Palestinians Only

- Reviews section -

Publication date: Thursday 22 July 2021

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**“The Palestinian cause is not a cause for Palestinians only, but a cause for every revolutionary, wherever he is, as a cause of the exploited and oppressed masses in our era.”
— Ghassan Kanafani**

This sentence from Kanafani’s history of the Great Revolt (1936-1939) in Palestine is the epigraph of a superbly edited volume of essays on Palestine from the Nakba (1948) to the present.

A well-known Palestinian novelist, journalist, and activist, Ghassan Kanafani (1936-1972) was a mentee of George Habash and a founding member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). He was assassinated by the Israeli secret service (Mossad), which claimed to be responding to the Lod airport massacre.

The sentence is also quoted at the beginning of the keynote speech given by Charlotte Kates, international coordinator of Samidoun (the Palestine Prisoner Solidarity Network), at a worldwide Zoom conference on May 1, 2021, called to outline a new vision for an alternative revolutionary path for the Palestinian struggle.

The conference was co-organized by Masar Badil (Alternative Palestinian Path), a group led by members of the Palestinian diaspora in Germany; videos of the keynotes are available at Samidoun.org.

As Kates points out, Kanafani’s internationalism is on display. “Many comrades [are] out on the streets today, in cities around the world, holding high the Palestinian flag, the banners of struggle, and the promise for justice and liberation.”

That has been so almost every day in recent memory. Palestine: A Socialist Introduction appeared in December 2020, the conference was held in May 2021, and the days since have seen a remarkably short tolerance around the world for Israel’s latest effort to “mow the lawn” once again in Gaza.

Two weeks of giant demonstrations and protests against dispossession in East Jerusalem and worship at Al Aqsa Mosque have shown that the message carried by these heralds and so many others is being received, loud and clear, on all possible channels. This time, the winds of change are blowing a lot harder.

This book offers an excellent and comprehensive quick course on the history, organizations, methods and outcomes of the Palestinian liberation struggle up to the present moment. Editors Sumaya Awad, a Palestinian activist based in New York, and Brian Bean, a Chicago-based socialist writer and editor, have assembled nine essays and interviews with socialists, mostly of Palestinian origins, that speak together of the past 73-year period of gradual intensification of Israeli government pressure on the Palestinian people to . . . vanish, poof!

Because this pressure takes various forms, from “legal” discrimination and dispossession to summary execution to mass murder, the volume considers the situation of Palestinians and their allies from every angle (gender, race, class) and locale — within various Israeli borders or in besieged or occupied land, and beyond, into the Arab and Muslim worlds and globally.

An introduction by the editors is followed by a brief timeline to aid readers who may be new to or unfamiliar with the long-unfolding history of the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean. The rest of the volume is divided

into three parts: “Circumstances Given and Transmitted from the Past,” “The Road to Jerusalem Goes through Cairo,” and a final programmatic section “Workers of the World, Unite.”

A conclusion by the editors is appended that might take the place of an introduction for pro-Palestinian socialists. A call to action spurred by the Great March of Return in 2018-19 forms an “afterword,” a bit extra like a second coda to a Romantic symphony, that welcomes the reader to the movement that is under way around the Earth.

History, Contradictions, Perspectives

The three contributions that gather and summarize the birth of the ongoing reality are master works of study, wide reading, and lived experience by Awad, Annie Levin (a member of Jewish Voice for Peace), and Egyptian activist Mustafa Omar. If you are young, think of learning from the wise; if a bit older, savor the scholarship and dedication in these essays.

The following group of three articles (“road to Jerusalem”) comes to grips with the nearly insoluble contradictions faced by any participant in the struggle who wants to know, going forward, who is an ally? What to make of the “peace process,” that phrase which covers a multitude of sins? And finally, how might the contradictions be unraveled?

Palestinian fighters for justice live in a set of nested boxes: The immediate ghetto into which they have been forced (the “Arab quarter” of the “mixed cities” within the current Israeli borders, or the West Bank, or Gaza, or the diaspora abroad) forms the first box; the Arab world, with its reactionary regimes and struggling masses, surrounds the first box; and the rest of the world in which similar struggles roil is the outer box. What must happen, then?

Here Daphna Thier, an Israeli anti-Zionist, contributes the already controversial “Not an Ally: The Israeli Working Class,” characterizing Israeli workers as bought-off by their privileged status, and whose organizations, no matter how far left they once claimed to be, are corrupt, deeply Zionist and class-collaborationist.

Her take will undoubtedly offend the doctrinaire or unaware so-called socialist who may dream of alliances between Palestinian toilers and their Israeli brethren. But in practical and tactical terms, she nails it. The old mole must dig too much dirt to emerge from this pile in recordable history. Certainly, the fundamental contradictions of capitalism are at work in this layer, as in any other class struggle — but indeed, it is not the first place to go to find comrades, however valuable they may be if ever they do awaken.

In “The Price of ‘Peace’ on Their Terms,” Toufic Haddad (director of the Council for British Research in the Kenyon Institute in East Jerusalem) ably sums up the bits and pieces of the process since Oslo and the position in which Palestinians are left by the current rhetoric in world capitals.

Haddad makes clear that — as has been happening while you read this — breaking the walls of the nested boxes is fundamental to the struggle as a whole.

Jehad Abusalim (an NYU graduate student who writes often about Palestine) concludes this section with a gloriously elegant essay “Palestine in Tahrir,” showing how the Arab uprisings since 2011 give the Palestinian struggle the leverage to open the middle box when another Arab spring occurs. Here are the forces whose work will be critical to the outcome.

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The book's third part turns to the work of showing what a program of action looks like today for socialists now working for Palestine to be free.

First is a long interview with Omar Barghouti, conducted by editors Awad and bean. Barghouti is the best-known spokesperson for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS) campaign begun by 150 Palestinian civil society organizations in 2006. BDS is analogous to the movement to boycott South Africa during Apartheid, and has been a singularly effective tool in bringing the Palestinian campaign for human rights before the world. The best sign of its effectiveness is the zeal with which Zionist opponents are backing legislation intended to undermine it.

Second, Nada Elia (a diaspora Palestinian scholar and activist) contributes a brief manifesto "Multiple Jeopardy: Gender and Liberation in Palestine," summarizing the effects of Zionist repression on Palestinian women and explaining how Palestinian liberation is very much a feminist cause.

Third, Khury Petersen-Smith (a co-founder of Black 4 Palestine) draws the many parallels between the U.S. Black struggle and the Palestinian cause, in an article aptly titled "Cops Here, Bombs There."

What is exciting about this book is its currency, and Haymarket's commendable agility here puts many another publisher to shame. Even more exciting is the triumph of presence and scholarship pulled off by the editors and their collaborators!

I have often thought, when watching some movie documentaries, how rarely those who have the skill and ability to attend to making films have the full knowledge of the participants in the struggles documented. I hope Awad and bean will continue to give us accounts like this one, visions of historical materialism and its call to action.

Source: [Against the Current](#)