

Anarchists Against the Wall

Anarchism Confronting Apartheid In Israel

David Finkel

2014

a review of

Anarchists Against the Wall: Direct Action and Solidarity with the Palestinian Popular Struggle, Edited by Uri Gordon and Ohal Grietzer, AK Press, 2013 139 pages, \$12. akpress.org

“Two States for Two Peoples—Two States Too Many,” has to be one of my favorite slogans coming from the against-all-odds struggle for a human future in Palestine and Israel.

It appeared on a leaflet distributed at a demonstration in Tel Aviv on May 15, 2004 (Israeli Independence Day) by members of the short-lived Anarchist-Communist Initiative (which) was formed by a small group of Israeli anarchists, some of whom were imprisoned for refusing to serve in the army.

That slogan resonates with me not because I particularly agree with it, or because it's likely to mobilize large numbers of people, and certainly not because it's “realistic.” I love the spirit of it, first for its defiance of the brutal reality of the Israeli state, and second, for its open contempt for the drivel about a “two-state solution” coming from the endless peace process that never produces peace.

The question, right now, isn't what solution is “realistic,” because there is in fact no solution possible on the basis of present power relations. In current conditions, the whole “one versus two states” debate is a meaningless exercise in self-indulgent abstractions.

What matters is finding ways to change the overwhelming U.S.-backed power of the Israeli state to strangle, starve and crush Palestinian aspirations for their freedom.

Anarchists Against the Wall (AAtW) is among the courageous groups engaged in that effort, most notably joining with the weekly mobilizations of the West Bank village of Bil'in against Israel's apartheid Separation Wall carving up their lands.

Organized in 2003, AAtW regards itself as “a pragmatic action initiative with no ideological platform.” Rather, “AAtW sweats off the excess weight of thick, heavy ideological frames by making practice its center of gravity...AAtW would rather apply tugging ropes, bolt cutters, and ten-pound hammers to deconstruct Israel's wall and express their disagreement with IDF [Israeli army] roadblocks.”

This small volume comprises two sections, “Statements and Speeches” consisting of leaflets and speeches and statements (at rallies, sentencing hearings, etc.), and thought-provoking “Essays and Reflections,” in which activists confront the political and emotional challenges they face as relatively privileged Israeli Jews accepting only a fraction of the dangers that their Palestinian friends live with every day.

They come face to face with the death of a child shot in the head as he goes to retrieve a sandal, with their own injuries and post-traumatic stress, and perhaps worst of all, with the fact that most of their fellow Jewish Israelis appear not to care or even notice.

Although specific to the realities of Palestine/Israel, some of these observations must hit home for all of us, as when AAtW activist, Kobi Snitz writes in her essay, “Tear Gas and Tea,” “To look away and ignore the crimes

committed in our names, with our taxes, by the students we train or those we keep polite company with, is to lose part of our humanity. This is a burden that Israelis are enslaved to by fear”—but surely, not only Israelis.

I won't try here to discuss in depth the profound challenges these short personal pieces raise, but I hope that readers will pick up the book as a window onto the Palestinian crisis that opens onto further exploration. AAtW's website awalls.org is worthwhile (although it doesn't appear to be too frequently updated).

The difficulties of sustaining this kind of effort are multiple. The website has an appeal for donations in solidarity with AAtW's tenth anniversary. As far as I can see from this collection, the group doesn't have members from Israel's 20 percent non-Jewish population (mostly Arabs of course, but also immigrant workers), and the co-editors of this volume, Uri Gordon and Ohal Grietzer, live and work in Britain and New York respectively—none of which detracts from AAtW's heroic contributions, but all goes to show its unavoidable organizational fragility.

For those of us outside Palestine/Israel, perhaps the most important activism we can do around the issue is to support the vibrant and diverse BDS (boycott/divestment/sanctions) movement, particularly targeting U.S. and multinational corporations that profit from the Israeli Occupation.

For information and resources, you can visit wedivest.org.

A particularly vicious current atrocity taking place inside Israel itself is the “Prawer Plan,” a forced removal of Bedouins—Israeli citizens—in the Negev desert from their lands and villages to make room for Israeli agribusiness, and putting them into “resettlement” towns which are nothing more than socially disastrous rural slums. For information and action appeals, see jewishvoiceforpeace.org/campaigns/theprawer-plan-act-now.

As Noam Chomsky has often pointed out, the facts about the catastrophe in Palestine are readily accessible even if they're not in the daily corporate media. The harder challenge is not to learn the reality, but to act on it.

David Finkel is a member of the Detroit chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace.

He is NOT to be confused with the *Washington Post* reporter who embedded with U.S. troops in Afghanistan. He has reviewed several books on the Palestine-Zionist conflict found at solidarity-us.org/node/3859

Anarchists Against the Wall can be reached at their Facebook site.

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