

Impossible Revolution

Review

Bill Weinberg

2018

a review of

Impossible Revolution: Making Sense of the Syrian Tragedy by Yassin al-Haj Saleh. Haymarket Books 2017

This book is a necessary corrective to the dominant perception—left, right and center—that the opposition in Syria are all jihadists and dictator Bashar Assad the best bet for stability.

Long a left-wing dissident in Assad's Syria, Saleh is a veteran of the dictator's prisons. Here, he traces the origins of the Syrian revolution to agony caused by the regime's "economic liberalization" (socialist phrases aside), describes the initially unarmed opposition's popular-democratic nature, and discusses the struggle to keep the Free Syrian Army accountable to this grassroots base after it became clear a military dimension to the revolution was necessary.

He makes the case that the Assad regime can be termed fascist even by the most rigorous definition, and also analyzes the emergence of "militant nihilism" in the form of ISIS and al-Qaeda (he rejects the word "terrorist" as propagandistic).

Saleh doesn't emphasize the influence of anarchism on the popular-democratic opposition, and offers little discussion of the Kurds, with their own anarchist-informed model and autonomous zone.

This is an oversight, as the Arab and Kurdish opposition have been very effectively played off against one another by Assad and the Great Powers. He also perhaps too readily dismisses the danger of a "tyranny of the majority" in Syria—that is, of Sunnis over the regime-favored Alawites and other minorities once the tables are turned.

But he notes the irony that these fears are often raised "by the very same people who stammer when it comes to discussing an already existing, incontestable tyranny."

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"Introducing al-Haj Saleh's Impossible Revolution" by Robin Yassin-Kassab (Qunfuz blog, July 20, 2018)

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