

Ghassan Kanafani

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of Ghassan Kanafani's birth in Acca, Palestine, in 1936, and 14 years since his martyrdom. Ghassan Kanafani was a member of the PFLP's Politbureau and the founding editor of its weekly Arabic magazine *Al Hadaf*. On July 8, 1972, comrade Ghassan and his niece Lamis were murdered in Beirut. Zionist agents had booby-trapped his car, and it exploded as he started the engine.

Ghassan's contribution to the Palestinian and Arab people's revolution was boundless, especially in the political and cultural fields. Ghassan played a leading role in laying the political foundation for the PFLP's transformation into a Marxist-Leninist organization. He wrote plays, novels and short stories. He painted and drew a number of posters. When we commemorate Ghassan, we always remember the slogan he articulated to be the guide for *Al Hadaf's* foundation and continuing practice: «All Facts to the Masses.» This expresses the essential thrust of all his works.

Ghassan's works were characterized by dealing with the essential dynamics of issues. To him, appearances mattered only in relation to their influence on the essence. In both his literary and political writings, Ghassan frequently addressed social issues which affect the revolution's development. As one example, Ghassan wrote about what was then known as the Abu Hamido case, in an article printed in the August 12, 1972 issue of *Palestine Affairs*, the journal of the PLO Research Center. Abu Hamido was a fighter in South Lebanon, who belonged to a non-Marxist resistance organization. He raped a woman, was sentenced to death by a revolutionary court, and executed. A shallow person would have read the news of this incident and been content with simply remarking that revolutionary justice had been done, but not Ghassan.

Instead, Ghassan wrote: «...even if Abu Hamido committed the crime of rape, the conditions of the revolution compell us to examine the crime consciously - if we want to consider it a political crime as well. If we view it through the consciousness of Abu Hamido, we must examine the political education in the organization to which he belonged. If the political education in that organization is advanced, if it is based on revolutionary discipline and behavior, and close relations with the masses, the punishment for a person

committing such a crime would be different than in an organization without discipline and political education.» Ghassan was not satisfied with guilt being assigned only to the individual who had deviated, but wanted to examine the deeper causes for the crime. He probed further into the revolutionary organization's responsibility for the conduct of its members. This is typical of many of Ghassan's articles which dealt with problems and shortcomings in the revolution, with a view towards correction and improvement.

THE LEADERSHIP PROBLEM

In his novel, *Men in the Sun*, Ghassan depicted the impotency of the

bourgeois leadership of the early sixties, raising the question of the impact of the class character of the leadership at a time when few had addressed this issue. In *Men in the Sun*, the Palestinian people are symbolized by individuals trying to find a solution to their problems by migrating to the Gulf states. In their journey, they are guided by an old man who had lost his manhood when fighting against the Zionists, and since become involved in smuggling migrants over the Arab borders. The three end up suffocating inside the tank of a truck, while the old man waits for having his papers stamped at a border post. Their bodies are thrown in a dump. The reader will question why they died. The answer is clearly woven into the story. They were victims of the wrong way to solve their problems, i.e., an individual solution, and the wrong leadership. Ghassan leaves the reader to think about the alternative.

In his writing, Ghassan utilized Marxism-Leninism as an analytical

Ghassan Kanafani's martyrdom was commemorated in occupied Palestine and in Palestinian communities in exile. In Damascus, Syria, there was a cultural event at the Soviet Cultural Center, attended by many representatives of the Palestinian resistance organizations and unions, and of the socialist countries. Also present was Leila Kanafani, Ghassan's daughter, who was seated beside Dr. George Habash, General Secretary of the PFLP. The program included speeches by Comrade Habash and by several Palestinian writers, and a performance by the *Al Ard (The Land)* folklore group.

Comrade Habash began his commemoration of Ghassan by saying: «Today, on the 50th anniversary of Ghassan's birth, I am glad to stand and say, with great pride, that he is still alive and fighting the enemy. Today, Ghassan's comrades salute him by carrying out a heroic military operation at Naharia, against the enemy that murdered Ghassan and tried to wipe out his memory from among us. Yet Ghassan still makes the enemy toss in his bed after his martyrdom, as he did during his lifetime...»

Dr. Habash and Leila Kanafani

