

The Arab Cultural Movement in the Zionist State

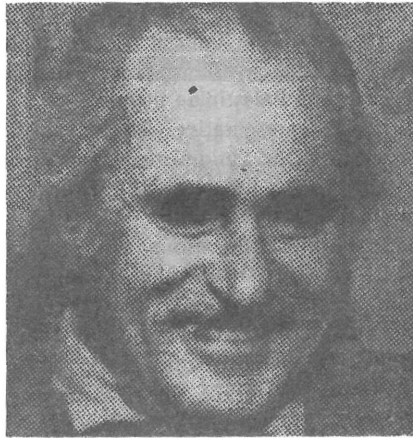
Below we have translated a chapter from the book, *The Arab Masses' Path of Struggle in Israel*, written by the famous Palestinian historian, Emil Tuma, and published in May 1982. Tuma died on August 27, 1985. He had been prominent in the Committee for the Defense of the Land and a politbureau member of the Israeli Communist Party (Rakah).

We've seen how the Israeli rulers always wanted the Palestinians to be only hewers of wood and drawers of water. These rulers have constantly obstructed secondary and university education (for the Palestinians). They've imposed a cultural siege around the Arab youth, depriving them of their history, traditions and even correct Arabic language. In the first period after the establishment of Israel, a thick wall was erected to prohibit contact between the Arab population and the Arab world, in an attempt to prevent the infiltration of Arab cultural works.

These rulers even went so far as to propose the «creation of Arabic works (stories, poems, etc.), using the Hebrew language, as Hebrew works were created using Arabic and scores of other languages.» This was suggested in an article by Iliahu Aghasi in the Israeli daily, *Davar*, on May 25, 1956. (Iliahu is one of the heads of the Histadrut's Arab department.)

But the plan to spread national nihilism among the Arab population failed, thanks to the efforts of the Israeli Communist Party and its newspapers and magazines: *Al Ittihad*, *Al Jadeed*, *Al Ghad* and *Al Darb*. These publications have provided the Palestinians with an abundance of Arabic cultural works. They were a window looking out on literary and cultural works in the Arab world, as well as socialist culture in the socialist world, and progressive culture in the capitalist world.

Soon the contradictions between the nihilistic education (in public schools) and the general atmosphere among the Arab population became evident. While being subjected to distorted education in school, a student could easily get acquainted with his Arab/Palestinian culture, thanks to the Communist Party's information campaigns. The conflict between the two



Emil Tuma

trends leaned more decisively in favor of the trend adhering to the progressive Arab culture. Progressive nationalist intellectuals have risen up and contributed to enriching the Palestinian and Arab culture with their literature, whether poetry, stories or research...

Several good poets have emerged with poems that harmonized revolutionary contents with an original form. In the field of literature, works focused on the themes of defending the land, staying in the homeland, the Palestinian people's destiny and the social struggle. Without reviewing all these works, we could mention the poetry of Samih Al Qasem, Tawfiq Zayyad, Mahmoud Darwish, Salem Jubran, Nayef Salem, Samih Sabbagh and others. Their poetry has expounded the suffering of the Palestinians as a result of racial discrimination and oppression in Israel, using different styles and forms, simple as well as complex. To this, we could add the two novels of Emil Habibi, *Al Mutasha'el* and *Laka*, and the short stories of Mohammad Ali Taha, Mohammad Naffa', Hanna Ibrahim, Afif Salem and others. In addition to literature, there are the works by some writers on Arab history and the Arab-Islamic progressive cultural history.

It is important to point out some facts when summarizing the cultural

situation of the Arab population in Israel:

- The oppressive authorities have not succeeded in their attempts to sever the masses' ties with their Palestinian Arab cultural heritage.
- On the contrary, Palestinian intellectuals have succeeded in establishing a bridge between the Palestinians and the Arab masses in the Arab world.
- Palestinian Arab intellectuals in Israel have suffered as did their counterparts in the Arab world, and even more. Both have struggled to overcome the sociopolitical crisis which erupted after the 1967 war.

Obviously, such a development did not occur in a vacuum. Rather it went through the conflict that erupted between those Arab 'intellectuals' loyal to the oppressive authorities, and the patriotic and revolutionary intellectuals. In the course of this conflict, several intellectuals, who had been loyal to the authorities, moved from their reactionary position to patriotic and progressive positions; others joined the (pan-Arab) nationalist trends. The contradictions between Palestinian intellectuals in Israel have been decisive in the social, national and political battles that intensified during the historical stages experienced in the country, the region and internationally. This conflict was decided in the form and contents of cultural works.

The cultural works of Palestinians in Israel have greatly affected the universities that were forced to take them into consideration. Secondary schools as well have decided to include the works of some Palestinian poets and novelists in the Arab literature courses. The importance of this should not be overlooked even though the choice has been selective. (Only descriptive, symbolic works and those dealing with love were chosen.) We believe that what has been going on in cultural circles since the establishment of Israel shows that Palestinian poets and novelists in Israel have participated in the enrichment of the Palestinian culture, as well as the overall Arab culture.

The Palestinian cultural movement that has emerged in Israel has every right to be proud of its victories, of having overcome the obstacles erected by the Israeli authorities and all the frustrations it faced from internal and external sources.