

Ghassan Kanafani

Lessons for the Revolution

Twelve years ago, on July 8, 1972, Ghassan Kanafani was killed by Israeli agents in Beirut, but his life and works had already deeply influenced not only the Palestinian revolution, but revolutionaries, nationalists and humanists all over the Arab world and abroad.

Writer, journalist, Palestinian leader and militant, Ghassan Kanafani was born in Acre in the North of Palestine on the 9th of April, 1936. He lived in Jaffa until he had to emigrate with his family in 1948. He then lived in several Arab cities like Damascus, Kuwait and Beirut, where he finally settled down in 1960 and remained until assassinated.

For a while Ghassan worked as a teacher, both in Damascus and Kuwait, and then entered the field of journalism at an early age. In 1963, he became the editor-in-chief of one of the Lebanese daily papers, but he continued to contribute articles to several weekly and daily publications.

Ghassan joined the Arab Nationalist Movement in 1954, and from that time on he was involved in the Arab-Palestinian struggle, both in his commitment and his practice. When the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine was formed, Ghassan was among its leading cadres. In 1969, he became the founding editor of its weekly paper, *Al Hadaf*. Later he was elected a member of the Front's politbureau and became its official spokesman.

A proficient novelist, successful journalist and political commentator, Ghassan was also a stimulating lecturer and debator, as well as a sharp influential critic and a strong, progressive militant. He was also engaged in the art of painting, which he taught in his early working life. He left quite a number of well known water colors, oil paintings and posters, as well as pencil and crayon sketches, which were later exhibited.

Ghassan was a very warm, likeable person with a bright sense of humour and a straightforward and humble personality. He was loved and is remembered as a brilliant revolutionary comrade who never lost sight of the main goals and priorities in spite of all the fields in which he was active.

His works are still alive, not only as a source of inspiration but as documented Palestinian history, art and political analysis from a period now ended. His short stories and theater focus on Palestinian experience of life under occupation and in exile and the immense suffering caused by this situation. However he never appeals to the pity of bourgeois 'good-doers', but carries this situation to its logical consequence: through revolutionary struggle the Palestinian people reconquer their pride and identity. His political analyses focus on issues which are not less central for the Palestinian revolution today, than when he wrote them.

Political Analysis

In «The 1936-1939 Revolt in Palestine» Ghassan analyzes a period which is central for understanding the problems and possibilities of the Palestinian revolution. As he states, «In the whole history of Palestinian struggle the armed

popular revolt was never closer to victory than in the months between the end of 1937 and the beginning of 1939.» This revolt was defeated, and Ghassan analyzes the reason for this defeat. As Marx analyzed the reasons for the defeat of the Paris Commune and Lenin analyzed the reason for the defeat of the 1905 revolution, Ghassan clearly saw that the same approach was necessary in order to strengthen the revolution, by learning from experience.

Ghassan analyzes the class composition of the Palestinian nationalist resistance, of its leadership and of the mass movement. He finds that the mass movement mainly consists of poor peasants, workers and beduins, while the leadership is dominated by feudal landlords, bourgeois and petit bourgeois forces. All these forces do have conflicting interests with Zionism and British imperialism, but «... the main outlines of the fundamental role that the feudal-clerical leadership was to play were established - it was to be a 'struggle' for a better position in the colonialist regime. But they could not engage in this 'struggle' without rallying around their support, the classes that were eager to free themselves from the yoke of colonisation. With this end in view, they drew up a programme that was clearly progressive, adopted mass slogans, which they were neither willing nor able to push to their logical conclusion, and followed a pattern of struggle which was quite out of character.» (p.10) The leadership found its allies in the Arab rulers especially in Transjordan, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, but as Ghassan points out, the Arab ruling classes were forced to support British imperialism against their counterpart in Palestine, which was in effect leading the Palestinian nationalist movement. The Brits managed to crush the revolt, mainly by «striking at the poor peasant revolutionaries with unprecedented violence, and employing their extensive influence with the Arab regimes which played a major role in liquidating the revolt.» At the height of the revolt the Arab rulers were able to make the Palestinian nationalist leadership stop the revolt: «In obedience to the orders of the kings and emirs, the strike was called off, and the activities of the revolt came to an end within two hours of the call being published.» (p.20) The Brits had been confident that Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Transjordan «were prepared to use their influence with the Palestinian leaders and put an end to the revolt» (p.20) - and they were, as Ghassan shows, completely right in estimating that the Arab rulers would give priority to their alliance with imperialism, not to the Palestinian nationalists. At this early stage of the Palestinian nationalist movement, Ghassan demonstrates how the Palestinian bourgeois cannot lead the revolt to success; whatever their intentions, their strategy leads to defeat because of their dependence on their alliance with imperialism.