The Palestinians
Speak. Listen!
The Palestinians Speak: An Introduction

It has frequently been charged in the West, especially after commando bombings, airplane hijackings, and Munich massacres that the Palestinian Arabs can speak only the language of violence.

Such accusations are at least partly misdirected, for rarely has a people suffered so much injustice so passively for so long, waiting for the powers-that-be to redress the inflicted wrong.

It is probably more true that violence is the only language the West understands. As they say in the tents, "No one hears our quiet cries for justice. Perhaps they will hear when the bombs explode."

As fellow westerners, we have not accepted our deafness as complete or as incurable. We believe that there is among us some capacity for hearing, for understanding, and for a wiser statesmanship.—Frank H. Epp and John Goddard.

About the authors

The Americans for Middle East Understanding (AMEU) is pleased to bring our readers this special issue of The Link, entitled "THE PALESTINIANS SPEAK."

The material for this issue was collected by Frank H. Epp and John Goddard of the Province of Ontario in Canada. Goddard is a photo-journalist for the Canadian Press in Ottawa, the Canadian capital. Epp is president of Conrad Grebel College affiliated with the University of Waterloo.

Dr. Epp has travelled to the Middle East regularly since 1968. His book Whose Land is Palestine: The Middle East Conflict in Historical Perspective (Eerdmans) is now in its second printing.

He has supplemented his historical studies with intimate acquaintance with the Middle East people themselves. McClelland & Stewart of Toronto will publish his The Palestinians: A Portrait in 1973. This book which will include the excerpts included in this pamphlet, will be based on interviews with over 150 Palestinians conducted since 1971.

Some work has also been done on a parallel volume, The Israelis: A Portrait.
PLEASE TELL YOUR PEOPLE

We don't need blankets, we don't need tents. We need understanding. We don't even need sympathy. Hypocritical sympathy we don't need. We want you to hear us and know us, hear both sides and then decide for yourself. God has given you all the wisdom to see and think and find the truth. That is all.—Refugee program director.

We want them to know that we are not terrorists. We are freedom fighters. We fight only to have a just peace in Palestine, where everyone can live as a Jew, as a Muslim, or as a Christian.—Radio news writer.

For an American woman it is as simple as this. Would she like to be displaced from her house and be thrown out, for somebody to come and live in her house? Would she accept this fact? I don't think she would. Our case is as simple as this. We were thrown out of our houses, our country, we want back our country. We want to live in our country.—Homemaker.

WE LOVE OUR LAND

The land of Palestine seems to have a grip on its people that perhaps is unusual in history or geography. The West fully understands apparently why, after over 2000 years, the Jews should still have this love and the desire to go back to Palestine. Now let's grant that that thing is genuine, that love for the land. My question then is: Why isn't the same love for the land, the same grip of the land extended to the Palestinians who have only been twenty years away, not two thousand, and they haven't been scattered all over the earth thousands of miles away? Most of them can still see it. Are the Palestinians less human? Are they less faithful to the land than the Jews?—Graduate student in town planning.

LEAVING OUR LAND: WE REMEMBER

I was only ten years old, but I remember every step. Every step was a bitter step. Some people left their children in the mountains and marched on.—Engineer.

My father died in 1948. They killed him in our house. Some bullets came from outside. They took him to the hospital for three or four days and then he died. I was four years old, and I had a brother who was only three days old.—Needlework lady.

I remember the scene, children screaming. I was about fourteen years old, but I noticed the tears in the eyes of our people, the children, the women, and the old men. There was a bitter feeling in every heart. We were without arms you see, to fight for our land. Some of the old men were willing to die fighting for our land. But they were without arms.—Radio Director.

We had to leave that part of the world just overnight and leave everything, our property, our business, our belongings, even our sentimental belongings. Sometimes I miss that little tree behind the house or that tomb of my father, my mother, or grandfather. These things are not of any material value, but they are of tremendous sentimental traditional value to me as a Palestinian. That is why we will not forget that part of the world and we will work very hard.

We are in exile now. My grandfather died in order to attain the liberty of his grandchildren, and his grandchildren are now in exile. This is intolerable. I mean it is not fair. We fought on the side of the Allies in order to attain our independence. What do we get in return? Exile. We lose our country. We lose our homes. Is this human? Is this just? Of course it is not.—Businessman.

THE REAL ISSUES

The issue now, as always, is the Palestinians exercising the right to self-determination in their own land. The Palestinians have been uprooted from Palestine. They have been forcibly thrown out of it. Those who have stayed have been treated as second-class citizens. They have become a subjugated, occupied, oppressed people, in a state which is avowedly racist, a colonialist state, which is also an expansionist state...

And therefore, the Palestinians are fighting a war of liberation. They are resisting their exile and occupation and are determined to continue in that struggle until Palestine is liberated. They want to create in lieu of an expansionist, racist, ethnocentric, closed state of Israel, a new land of Palestine, a democratic non-sectarian, secular, open, multiple, plural state in which Jews, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, atheists, those who belong and who believe in Palestine as an open non-exclusive society can share work, cooperate, live together and really create a modern state which is integrated in the Arab world of which it is a part.—College Professor.
THE REAL ISSUES

There is an erroneous conception in the minds of many in the West that the Israelis are giving concessions if they allow a few thousand refugees to come back to the occupied territories. Well this is truth upside down. It’s the Palestinians who are giving the biggest concession by allowing those alien Jews to come to our country, illegally and against our wishes. They took away our land, our homes, massacred our people, committed untold atrocities. The Arabs are always discriminated against. We are the bad guys. It’s like a western style movie. The Arabs are the guys with the black hats. The Jews are the guys with the white hats. This again is truth in reverse. It should be the other way around. We are the ones who are punched, kicked, down on our backs. We are bleeding, and if we try to get up and fend the blows, we are called terrorists. But their action is called self-protection, self-survival.—Graduate student.

Our problem is very simple. A foreigner came and took our land, took our farms and our homes, and kicked us out. We have in mind to return.—A farmer.

WE ARE PALESTINIANS ALL

The Arabs have been there for hundreds and hundreds of years. The Russian Jew or Polish Jew has never seen or even smelled the Palestine air.—Chartered accountant.

When the older generation will die then we are the ones who are going back to Palestine.—High school student.
WE LEFT MAINLY BY FORCE

When the Israelis attacked Acre, the people were trying to defend the town. The battle between them was expected to be quite a serious one, and houses were attacked, people were shot at and so on. It was very unsafe for people to stay. People were really running away from terror more than anything else. They just wanted to save their lives because of the terror of Israelis coming in.—Physician.

I came with my family in April-May of 1948 when I was about nine years old. I continued my education and then moved on to college and university. I was in Schmidt Girls' School, a German school in Jerusalem in the Jewish zone, right behind Cinema Zion. The students were subjected to snipers' bullets. Once somebody put a bomb in the courtyard, and then the taxi drivers refused to enter the courtyard. After that they closed the school.—College Teacher.

Many of the villagers were really raped in 1948. When in 1967 the war took place, the most important thing was to try to avoid this and escape. It came out that about 5% percent of the people fled to save the honour of their women.—Secretary.

They drove us out of Lydda like a herd of cattle.—Accountant.

In about June or July, 1948, when Haganah army conquered Lydda they asked us to stay in our houses for the time, not to go out, not to move. The second day the soldiers were searching every house. The third day they went around with loud-speakers telling everybody to gather near the church in the old city. So I took my old mother and two sisters and we walked. They said leave everything in the house, we might be in the church for two days. Take only your necessities, your clothing. So we put a little clothing in a suitcase and walked. On the way, they said to everybody to keep moving. We had to keep moving a little further and a

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little further. Then we found ourselves out of town. They said again, keep moving. They kept us moving to the valleys and over the mountains on the way between Lydda and Ramallah.

And on the road, I think there was no water, nothing to eat. We had to keep walking for about three days. I could see with my eyes, many children died from thirst. Many old men and old women also died on the way, because there was no water and they could not keep on walking and walking through the mountains...

... On the way, I forgot to tell you, they were searching everybody, men and women for money, for gold and anything. That friend of mine refused to give the two soldiers the Palestinian pounds. One of them just took the revolver and shot him there.—Businessman.

EVERYTHING WAS LEFT BEHIND

I come from a very well-to-do family, and I remember that year my father had to sell his car to support me because we lost really everything of value in the Palestine which was occupied. We had two groves and we had some houses in Jaffa.—Physician.

My friend was crying. He said, I lost my mother. I lost my home. I lost my work. I lost everything... It is such a tremendous tragedy. And I think this has made us so hard.

I think if people had realized at that time that they weren't going to go back, they wouldn't have left. You see it was the first time anything like that had happened. My mother left everything. She left her clothes. She left her things to sew, the pictures, the paintings, photographs, everything like that. Things people would not leave behind if they didn't intend to return. And they thought it would be just a matter of time when the Arab governments would win over these few terrorist gangs as we thought.—Professor.

OUR ORCHARDS AND CULTURE

The orange groves were there before the Jews came, you see. Before I was born my father had two orange groves, and they exported twenty-three million boxes in 1948 from Jaffa. The tour conductor kept talking about these orange groves that the Israelis had planted since 1948. They were going through the Jaffa area to Jerusalem.

Fortunately, there was a little American lady on the bus. And she sat in the back of the bus, you know, and the tour conductor went on to talk about the great achievements of the
Israelis in orange planting and all that, and she said: Nonsense, that orange grove is certainly older than twenty years.
—Grandmother.

One of their main exports right now is oranges. And these oranges are called Jaffa oranges. And Jaffa is a twin city of Tel Aviv. How come these oranges are not called by the name of their capital Tel Aviv rather than being called by the name of the Arab city which was Jaffa. It is very simple. Palestine was one of the arable and well-cultivated lands. There were some deserts at the top but we never needed that desert.
—Systems Analyst.

WE ARE STATELESS

I always have this nagging fear as most Palestinians have in Arab countries and otherwise. One day somebody will tell you your visa has expired and you are out of a country. You have no rights, absolutely no rights. Your work permit expires, you can’t work anymore.

In Cairo airport I saw four Palestinians who had been there for seventy-four days because they could not get visas to enter any country. They had just been in the airport. They had been thrown out of one Arab country, and no other Arab country would accept them.—College Teacher.

THE CAMPS ARE SOMETHING ELSE

We were thrown outside our country, and the Jews from all over the world came and settled in our homes and in our lands, and now we are living in camps.—Camp Doctor.

They give each family three gallons of water for the whole day. If we are seven people in the family, and we get three gallons, what are we going to do. They want to make washing, bath, dishes, and to drink, and to cook. It is very hard.—Needlework lady.

I believe that if you would stay in camp for one week, you would be sick. You would feel that you had to fight your father, not to speak of fighting Israel.—Administrator.

We are nine people living in this hut. We have no electricity in the camp so I think we sleep around nine hours, and get up around 5 o’clock in the morning.—Camp Resident.

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ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPATION

I left teaching voluntarily in 1967. I can't teach that Palestine was always Jewish and that we are parasites. They wanted us to teach the syllabus they are using for Arabs and Israel. They wanted us to teach that our prophet was a liar, a distortion of all Middle East history. A few other teachers responded the same way.—Engineer.


Tell me did the French people accept the Nazis during World War II, even though the Nazis did not throw them out of their homes and did not confiscate their land and properties? Would the Belgians, the Dutch, the Norwegians, any Europeans invaded by the Germans in the Second World War have accepted and lived with the invading Nazis? This is the same case. Why do you expect us actually to be less in looking after our own rights than other people?—Jerusalem Mayer in Exile.

I can just imagine an eastern Jew, originally from Morocco or something, living in the slums of Jerusalem for twenty years.

DISCRIMINATION

You find discrimination in identity cards. All Jews have a card. Why does the Arab living in Israel 22 years still have identity card No. B? And discrimination in business. An Arab businessman cannot import from outside directly: he has to buy whatever he needs from a Jewish big store. There is discrimination among employees, and especially discrimination in science.—Church Bishop.

POLITICS AND GOOD CITIZENSHIP

Demonstrations have been crushed ruthlessly. Strikes have been stopped with threats of shop closures. Even the ladies have been taken by force by the police. The schools are threatened. Anyone who protests is threatened. If you don't find people protesting, it is not because they don't want to protest, but because they fear harsh treatment. There is no tranquility in the West Bank. People are afraid.—Priest.

In elections you have to vote. If you don't, they make a red mark. They stamp the identity card. If the mark isn't there, it means that you aren't a very good citizen. So I go to get my card stamped, but I don't really vote.—Physician.

THE PRISONS

I was kept there for four days and questioned many times, but I was not hurt. But the place I was kept in was very, very near to that room of torture. I could hear everything that took place between the other victims and the torturers, the sound of beating, of electricity, of being hung, everything that took place in the other room.—Exiled Women's Movement Leader.

I am not against arresting criminals, I am not against blowing up houses belonging to terrorists, to criminals. But I'm against blowing up houses without trial.—Historian, Former Mayor.

EMPTYING OF THE LAND

A policy of emptying the land? He who sees deeply knows the answer. A Jewish family is always preferred before an Arab family.—Priest.

There are various types of pressure, some direct and indirect. Immediately after the 1967 war, the direct was more
evident in Bethlehem. Israeli loudspeakers told us we had two hours to evacuate before the town was destroyed. Some people left. We had learned the lesson of 1948. Our family decided to stay whatever happened. There are indirect pressures. Many families have been separated. Often the head of a family is not allowed to come back.—College Teacher.

Early American Jew who comes here displaces at least one Palestinian who has no other place to go.—Seamstress.

Why are they demolishing these houses? Because they want to do away with the Arabs in their country. They want to evacuate the country from its children. Now they are trying to make Jerusalem Jewish by demolishing houses. So far they have demolished from Jerusalem 482 houses and demolishing is still going on.—Historian.

As far as I can judge Israel aims at expansion and this is what Arabs feel most. If the aim is to bring more Jews they will need more land. This gives rise to Arab fears. It is a racist state as far as it would restrict people to a particular state and religion.—Professor.

We will go back after a while, you see. After 100 years, maybe 1,000 years, but we will return later.—Farmer.

WE ARE COMMANDOS ALL

We are all in the guerilla organization. We work lots of things. The condition to be a Palestinian is to fight. If any Palestinian says that he represents the Palestinian people, but does nothing for them, then he is an enemy and then we give ourselves the right to stop him where he stands by hook or crook.—Commando.

I think any American would die for his country when the time comes. And I feel that we have such a worthy cause that it is very hard for a Palestinian not to be doubly committed because of the injustice.

I am talking from my heart really. Sometimes when I eat, I think ‘here I am eating’ and there are so many people thrown out in the desert. Houses are demolished and they don’t have any place to go. So we suffer very deeply.—College Teacher.

Dayan is supposed to have a daughter. And she is supposed to have said that if she was a Palestinian Arab she would be a commando.—Camp Administrator.

FOR US THE LAST RESORT

Our people don’t carry machine guns and bombs because they enjoy killing. It is for us the last resort. For over 20 years we waited for the United Nations and the United States, for liberty, freedom, and democracy. There was no result. So this is our last resort. This is the only way to get back to Palestine. It worked in China, it worked in Cuba, it worked in many other countries, and it is going to work in Palestine.

For our part we are willing. And we can. It doesn’t cost us much. We are not losing billions of dollars of effort, we are not losing the human manpower, we are not losing anything other than time. And time is on our side.—Education Director.

The world started knowing about us when we raised arms. Today, for example, the Vietnamese people...The world simply knows about them simply because they are fighting. The people heard only about Algeria because they fought their way to self-determination. The world would also know about us through our armed struggle.—Commando Officer.

We are not going to be trapped again by world public opinion. The information machine is in the hands of our enemy. We must reach it by other means, through the armed struggle. That’s exactly how the Vietnamese reached world public opinion.—Commando Editor.

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I tell you why they fear the resistance. Because they themselves have experienced it. They know that when they resorted to popular resistance themselves they succeeded in occupying the land, they succeeded in occupying Palestine.
—Father of Imprisoned Commando.

THERE IS NO CHILDHOOD

The Palestinian question is nursed among the children as with milk since their childhood. The mothers talk about it. The fathers talk about it. The older brothers talk about it. The teachers talk about it. What does the child learn about the Jews? He knows that we were living before in Palestine with the Jews in good friendship and all nice things.

It is wonderful to feel that my children, who have hardly seen Palestine, they are more Palestinians than myself.
—Chest Surgeon

I am proud to see that our children are able to do that. I am only sorry it is necessary that they should do it. Our children don’t have much of a childhood. They don’t have toys and things, and even when they play games, they are mostly war games. It is a pity that a child should lose the best years of his childhood on this. But it is necessary, and I believe that this is a very good sign for the moment.
—Camp Administrator.

WE HAVE OUR WEAKNESSES

At least I’ve noticed over and over again that every time internal problems increase in Israel—bang!—there’s an external problem. In ’55 immigration was virtually dying out. We got the ’56 war. In ’66 there was over 10-12 percent unemployment rate in Israel. The economy was dying. This is all documented in their own statistics. Immigration had virtually halted and emigration out of the country was increasing tremendously and everything like that. Bang! We got ’67. And we gave it to them. We fell in the trap.
—Graduate Student.

RUSSIANS AND COMMUNISM

But please don’t misunderstand. We are not pro-Russian. If you come all over the Middle East you don’t see anybody who speaks Russian. We are not pro-Russian. But the Americans are pushing us. They are pushing us to the Russians. We have no other alternatives.
—Accountant.

Russia is not naive. In Russia they are playing their game exactly as good as the Zionists are playing it. What I am afraid of is that the time might come when only Zionists and Russians
If you read history the Muslims in general and the Arabs in particular have been perhaps the most hospitable to the Jews in the last two thousand years. They've been the place to which the Jews have always gone for refuge whenever they were persecuted in Europe.
—Graduate Student.

We are against the political regime, not against the Jews as a religion.
—News Writer.

This anti-Semitic thing is misused. You can't become anti-Semitic when you are an Arab because you are a Semite.
—Education Director.

The Israelis obviously have things under control. They have the support of the Americans. There is no real hope of going back in this generation. I think it is facing of reality frankly. I think the Palestinians have come to realize that the old motto of throwing the Zionists into the sea is nonsense. The issue now is more like us going back rather than driving them out from our land.
—Medical Doctor.

**REALISM AND OPTIMISM**

The Zionist movement is against the course of history, against the ideas for which humanity fought millions of years: justice, humanity, non-discrimination, equality.
—Commando Editor.

I say the resistance, the resistance as such is a frame of mind. It's a feeling which is very difficult to crush to start with. It will lay low, it will go under, it will come up, depending on circumstances but the resistance is a question of spirit and the spirit is something as long as there are people then that spirit, the spirit is there. It will not disappear.
—Businessman.
THE LINK aims at maintaining contacts among Americans who believe that friendship with the people of the Middle East is essential to world peace, who would contribute to this goal by spreading knowledge of the history, values, religion, culture and economic conditions of the Middle East, and who would do this contest-press for greater fairness, consistency and integrity in U.S. policy toward that area.

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AMEU's Book Distribution Program fills a very special and unique need. While there is a great variety of books on Zionism, Israel and the Israelis, there is a dearth of material which presents the alternate point of view. In an effort to redress this imbalance, soon after AMEU came into existence in 1967, it began to offer—at discounts of 40% plus costs of mailing and packing—a number of books showing "the other side of the coin".

These books were chosen to help acquaint the reader with the history, goals and values of the people of the Middle East and broaden understanding of their religious beliefs, economic conditions and social customs.

The Book Distribution Program has met with marked success among AMEU's constituency. AMEU's friends comment not only upon the savings they receive but also upon the fact that under normal circumstances the books are dispatched to them within 24 hours after the order has been received. AMEU feels that one of its major functions is that of enabling AMEU to purchase books in larger quantities. Book publishers and sellers know of our interest in Middle East titles. Some seek our advice before publication. Others have been encouraged to publish titles AMEU thought would be helpful in building Middle East understanding; thus, the influence of the program is broader than it may appear at first glance.

Long-time friends of AMEU will be pleased to note that four new titles have been added to the offering this month. They are:

1. Abirar Duncan, THE NOBLE SANCTUARY, 80 pp. / 2.00. Longman Group, Ltd. A collection of some of the most beautiful colored pictures of Jerusalem, the Dome of the Rock and details of Arab design, accompanied by an appreciative text giving the history and the various phases of construction and restoration of "The Noble Sanctuary." One cannot read this book without developing a deeper appreciation of the art, architecture, religion and philosophy of his fellow man in the Arab East. An ideal gift. Our price $1.00.

2. Norman A. Horner, DISOBEYING CHRISTIANITY WHERE IT BEGAN, 339 pp. Paperback / Lebanon 3.00. Heidelberg Press, Lebanon. The churches in the Middle East are presented from two viewpoints: their historical origins and their present status. The appendix gives valuable information statistically and lists eccumenical agencies at work in the area today. Our price $1.00.

3. D. Magrietti & M.A. Sigler, AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NEAR EAST, 249 pp. Paperback / $3.95. Our Sunday Visitor, Inc. The authors give a very readable short general history of the Near East from ancient times to 1967, followed by a factual study of each Near Eastern country, designed for students. A third section gives a study of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, followed by a section on suggested student activities and a rather comprehensive annotated bibliography. Our price $2.25.

4. Ray Vicker, THE KINGDOM OF OIL, 264 pp. $7.95. Chas. Scribner's Sons. A fascinating fiction-like, but not fiction, factual study of the history, politics, religions and social customs of the Middle Eastern countries and their emergence into modern world history via oil. The author traces the shift of power from Western to Arab hands in the politics of oil and offers some suggestions for the future as far as energy is concerned. Our price $5.00.

Your attention is called to three of the books previously reviewed and offered:

1. W.F. Abboudhi, THE ANGRY ARABS. 285 pp. $8.95. Westminster Press. (Fully reviewed in the May/June 1974 LINK.) With a view to satisfying the awakening interest of the American public in the Arab world and with a desire to contribute toward an honest, workable and workable peace between Arabs and Israelis, the author clearly presents the Arab's values, customs, goals, traditions, etc. Our price $5.75.


3. John H. Davis, THE EVADE S PEACE (once more available in hardback). 124 pp. / 1.50. John Murray, London. The author gives the factual background to the present Arab-Israeli dilemma and presents a policy which could well lead to a permanent peace in the Middle East—without which he fears future wars are inevitable. Our price $2.10.

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