

Mary Elizabeth King, *A Quiet Revolution: The First Palestinian Intifada and Nonviolent Resistance*, Perseus Books, 2008

This book is a must for anyone interested in deepening his or her understanding of civil (nonviolent) resistance both in general and in the particular context of the first Palestinian Intifada. That Intifada - literally 'shaking off' - began in response to the death in December 1987 of four Palestinians at an Israeli checkpoint, but, as Mary King shows in this meticulously researched study, the groundwork was laid by the development of civil society organizations, including notably women's organizations, during the 1970s and 1980s, by the work of joint Israeli-Palestinian Committees promoting the idea that both Israelis and Palestinians have rights over the land they contest, and by outside influences which led to a re-assessment of the best way to challenge the occupation. She also shows that civil resistance was by no means alien to Palestinian culture and tradition and that it had been employed, for example, in the 1920s and 1930s during the British Mandate to oppose the creation of a Jewish state at the expense of the Palestinian population. An important contribution from outside was made by one of the leading academic specialists on civil resistance, Gene Sharp, a Peace News staff member in the mid 1950s and for some years a frequent contributor to the paper.

While reports and news footage of the Intifada at the time tended to focus on the confrontation between stone-throwing Palestinian youths and the Israeli army, the campaigns of non-cooperation, civil disobedience and other forms of nonviolent action were at the heart of the campaign. From early on too there was an internal debate about the desirability and effectiveness of even this limited use of violence, with opponents of the tactic like Sharp, and the founder of the Palestinian Centre for Nonviolence, Mubarak Awak, arguing that it would tend to undermine the efforts to build alliances with sympathetic elements within Israel and to negate the 'political jiu-jitsu' effect that can result from responding nonviolently to the use of force. What is clear from Mary King's account is that there was a conscious decision by the initiators of the intifada not to use firearms or other lethal weapons, and that the non-military - if not strictly nonviolent - resistance to the Israeli army won unprecedented sympathy for the Palestinian cause within Israel and in the wider world, and led to the negotiations in Madrid and Oslo for a two-state solution to the conflict.

Alas, that historic opportunity was largely squandered. The first Intifada came to an end in 1990 with Hamas and other groups hostile to the nonviolent strategy escalating the 'armed struggle'. Moreover, the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995 were negotiated without reference to the community that had produced the intifada and, in the words of the Palestinian writer Amal Jamal, 'the negotiations were a clear attempt to bypass the local leaders of the West Bank and Gaza and to restore the status of the PLO leaders in Tunis'. The Oslo Accords provided for a process for ending Israeli rule over more than two million Palestinians and recognized their political rights, but the expectation that this would rapidly lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state proved illusory. Instead, Israel has expanded its settlements and constructed the notorious West Bank barrier which cuts into and subdivides Palestinian territory and very possibly puts pay to the prospect of a viable

Palestinian state. For its part, the Palestinian Authority, like Israel, has flouted the human rights of those under its control in the name of security and alienated many of those who found a voice and a method of action in the democratic institutions that preceded and spearheaded the first Intifada. To the extent that there is still hope, it resides in those institutions and communities, the support they receive internationally from bodies like the International Solidarity Movement, and the strategy of nonviolent resistance which did so much to advance the Palestinian cause during the first Intifada.

Michael Randle