

Abstract

The movement of public school teachers in Palestine began to crystallize in the thirties and forties of the twentieth century; it witnessed further development in the fifties, only to see its progress arrested. The public school teachers' movement regained its vitality under the Israeli occupation in 1967, when teachers organized a strike under the aegis of the Federation of Jordanian Teachers in the West Bank.

The Palestinian teachers' movement developed within the context of the national struggle against the occupation. As such, its history and development are an integral part of the course the national movement has taken during the period since 1967.

This study has traced the history of the movement of public school teachers from its clandestine beginnings in 1967, followed by its tentative but arrested development in the 1970s, to its resurgence in the 1980s, ending with its renewed activity in the period following the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority.

The teachers' movement developed under changing circumstances, ranging from direct suppression of their activities by the Israeli occupation authorities to a toleration of their activism when the use of brute force was deemed ineffectual by these authorities. The teachers developed structures and means of struggle that varied with the changing circumstances, ranging from clandestine committees and frameworks to public or semi-public structures. These changing modes of struggle also meant different ways of organizing and managing the movement, and varying degrees of internal democracy and responsiveness to the mass base of the movement. The participation of teachers in the movement was also affected by the general conditions under which the movement developed; women, for instance, did not participate at an equal rate with men, given the prevailing social and security considerations.

This study has also examined the relationship between the teachers' movement and political parties and organizations active in the national movement, and the impact of the close association between them on the independence and effectiveness of the teachers' movement.

The study has explored the different axes along which the movement developed; it found that even though the national, anti-occupation objective was the basic unifying force, economic considerations (wages and work conditions) and the demand for the establishment of a representative body for teachers were the main issues around which teacher activism was expressed throughout the period covered in this study.

This does not mean that the movement did not pay attention to the educational implications of Israeli control over the system of education in occupied Palestine. The study therefore examined some aspects of the teachers' struggle concerning the curricula, the closure of schools by military order, and the widespread arrests of students and teachers.

The study concluded that the teachers' movement, despite its various successes, has not succeeded in establishing its independent organizations. The

reasons for this were explored in the study, with special reference to the nature of and relations with the ruling authority and the prevailing legal framework.

The study has devoted a chapter to the teachers' movement under the Palestinian Authority, and discussed the renewal of teacher activism around the issue of recognition of teachers' unions and long-standing demand for an improvement in wages and working conditions. The study has also explored the way the Palestinian National Authority dealt with the teachers' movement, locating it within the larger context of the troubled relations between the Authority and civil society institutions, where the former has pursued the path of containment and hegemony over civil society. Nevertheless, the teachers' movement has proved to be the only societal movement to have come into conflict with the nascent political authority.

The teachers' movement has not succeeded in achieving its aims; however, its continued activism around the core issues has opened the possibility of realizing its objectives in establishing independent organizations representing the interests of teachers.