

JVP News

Spring 2019 Jewish Voice for Peace Newsletter

We STAND with ILHAN

The attacks on Rep. Ilhan Omar might not stop anytime soon - but the political dynamics behind them are transforming at a breakneck pace.

The hypocrisy is breathtaking. Representative Ilhan Omar has taken on the outsized role of AIPAC and other pro-Israel groups. Conservatives and liberals, including Democratic Party leaders, have spared nothing in attacking her.

Meanwhile, the truly antisemitic messages from her colleagues in Congress ("We can't like Soros buy the election"), to say nothing the Islamophobic attacks she herself faces, generate only a fraction of the outrage.

Many times this winter, it seemed like the story was going to be another example of an emergent leader undone by their refusal to soft-pedal Palestinian rights.

But the story is going somewhere we haven't exactly seen before: forward.

That's part of a larger phenomena, the generational ascendance of a new progressive coalition that integrates Palestinian rights into its agenda based on universal rights and the need for equality and freedom for all people.

Young people, women, and people of color are in the leadership generally of this new progressive movement, and their support for Palestinian rights sits as a natural part of an agenda based on fairness, dignity and freedom.

This is, as you probably recognize, precisely the coalition within which most JVP members identify, and the leadership we most often follow.

It hasn't been easy. The exhaustion and rage that so many people - Muslims, Palestinians, Black people, Jews of color, and Jews who support Palestinian rights - experience as these battles continue to play out does have one silver lining.

The only antidote to the pro-Israel lobby is building a strong, grassroots movement of people willing to stand up for Palestinian rights. That's what ended U.S. support for apartheid in

South Africa, it's what won civil rights victories for Black Americans in the 1950s and 60s, and it's what shifted American views on gay marriage over the course of ten short years.

And that's what we're building.

Leading Black scholars and activists from Angela Davis to Marc Lamont Hill to Michelle Alexander are speaking out strongly on behalf of Palestinians -- and find themselves targeted in return.

The policing of these Black leaders, including Rep. Omar, includes holding them to higher standards than white Christian leaders. It's based on an assumption of bad faith, and the morally dubious decision to make Black leaders the examples of anti-Jewish sentiment in this country at a time when antisemitism as an expression of right-wing white supremacy is truly on the rise.

In response, JVP members have mobilized in creative, principled, and effective ways around the country.

Our members hosted 40 shabbats to honor and symbolically welcome

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PALESTINE will be FREE



"It's never been more important to be able to distinguish centuries-old antisemitic tropes about Jews and money from the unmistakably urgent need to get money out of politics"

"It's partly because of and through palestine that internationalism is coming back"

My answer is always "Whatever you're most passionate about, because that's where you'll do the best work." We have a lot of needs in our movements, for lots of smart, committed, principled, educated people.

My own analysis is that corporate control of our economic and electoral and political systems is the most fundamental problem we face - but that's not what I'm most passionate about. Who

knows why? Maybe because I've never been very good at math.

So I work on what I'm most passionate about - war and peace, Palestine, internationalism. And issues of national liberation. I'm a child of the 60s and 70s when national liberation was the struggle of the era in the context of decolonization and the Cold War. I trace my Palestine work to the war in Vietnam. I was and am an internationalist. I happen to be Jewish, but that's not what defines me.

BRINGING INTERNATIONALISM BACK

Right now, within the broadly defined peace/anti-war/anti-militarist movement, the Palestine movement is probably the only component that's

on the rise, getting bigger, younger, bringing in leadership from people of color, gaining influence and popularity. It's a great reflection on our work, with lots of lessons for other parts of the antiwar movement too.

And it's partly because of and through Palestine, that internationalism is coming back. We saw that in Ferguson, with the solidarity between Palestinians and Ferguson activists over how to combat the tear gas used against Black activists in Ferguson, the same kind the US sells to Israel for use against Palestinians.

Look at the Poor People's Campaign, one of the most exciting intersectional movements around, rooted in Dr. King's "evil triplets" of racism, poverty and militarism, plus climate. Targeting militarism is a key component for our

organizing now as it was for MLK, but it's a little harder for people today. It's not organic at this moment as it was in the 60s with Vietnam.

Right now the Palestine movement is so much on the rise - we're seeing it in Congress and beyond. And we're seeing more attacks because we're winning -- most notably against Black and Arab intellectuals who take up Palestine work and are being punished more harshly than anybody else.

But in that context, I think the Palestine movement is providing an internationalist component to other movements that's very very powerful. Other movements strengthen the Palestine movement, and the Palestine movement them. That's what it's going to take to get the kind of change we need. •

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Angela Davis after she was denied a human rights award because of her dedication to Palestinian rights.

In the wake of the latest attacks on Rep. Omar, we've helped shape the media debate with stories in Newsweek and the AP.

And our supporters - I'd bet including you - are having literally tens of thousands of conversations with family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors about this moment, and helping make sense of it as part of the large-scale political battle happening in this country.

That's probably what is most important, impactful, and exciting.

It has never been more important to

be able to distinguish between the critique--even the harshest critique--of a state's policies (Israel), and discrimination against a people (Jews). It's never been more important to be able to distinguish centuries-old antisemitic tropes about Jews and money from the unmistakably urgent need to get money out of politics.

And it's never been more important to remember that the changes we're working for - including having government representatives who actually represent us - is going to be difficult, complicated, and relentlessly attacked.

Israel does not represent all Jews. Not all Jews support Israel. Speaking out for Palestinian human rights and yearning for freedom is in no way related to antisemitism, though the Israeli government does its best to obscure

that. And yes, there are antisemites who support Palestinian rights, and they have no place in any movement for justice, which Palestinian leaders of the movement have made very clear.

Omar herself is not backing down, firing back at her critics, "We must be willing to combat hate of all kinds while also calling out oppression of all kinds."

She will be joined by many more, but only if we're willing and able to fight to defend them--by speaking about antisemitism with passion and precision, by challenging racism and Islamophobia, and by holding our institutions and elected officials accountable to ending the injustices in Israel/Palestine once and for all. •

(why I stay) **FOCUSED** **ON PALESTINE**

We asked JVP Board Member Phyllis Bennis what has kept her working in the Palestine freedom movement - and what connections she sees and is helping to make across the entire social justice landscape.

WHAT I DO

I WORK ON A LOT OF ANTI-WAR ISSUES. MOST of the US wars today are in the greater Middle East/North Africa region. It's not ever completely disconnected from Palestine - Palestine is a key issue in all those countries.

I work to end the war in Yemen, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Syria, and of course the threats against Iran. There's a direct link to Israel/Palestine because the anti-Iran coalition the Trump administration is trying to build is designed

to be led by Saudi-Israeli collaboration. Palestinians among others will pay the price.

Then there's the broad issue of militarism. I'm working with others to build anti-militarism into all of our movements -- against racism and environmental injustice, for women's and LGBTQ and immigrant rights, against Islamophobia and antisemitism and xenophobia, partly because we need to end these wars that are failing at everything except killing people around the world. And partly because cutting the military budget is really crucial for

every issue. Whether it's Medicare for All, free college education, a vGreen New Deal, or rebuilding decimated communities of color, the answer to "where you gonna get the money?" has to be, in part, "from the military budget."

FOLLOWING MY PASSION

I speak at colleges a lot. And committed young student activists often ask me "I want to work on the most important issue for changing the world, what should I focus on?"

FACES IN THE CROWD

After a two-year process with literally thousands of JVP members and hundreds of allies, our National Board released a statement opposing Zionism. It's generated **a lot** of conversation - which is a good thing!



RECKONING WITH OUR ANCESTORS

My hope for this document is that it becomes a reference in history books - a step forward for American Jews in reckoning with Zionism. Even though it's not the statement I would personally have written, I do think we've issued something that can help us on that path. The process of writing this reminded me of the lovingly challenging conversations I had with my grandparents about Zionism. It was a genuine consideration of our ancestors, the choices they made, the lessons they taught us - even and maybe especially the contradictions in those lessons. **Annie Kaufman, JVP National Board**



ROOTED IN LOVE The statement makes me so happy for future generations of JVP organizers. After 13 years of Jewish education, even after starting to think differently about Palestine and Zionism I felt like I was always beating around the bush when I tried to talk. It gave me what I needed: a way to talk about anti-Zionism that wasn't about a lack. I don't think anti-Zionism is about rejection, even though I get how when you come from a Zionist background, it really can feel very much like a loss - of community, of education, maybe even of family. But this statement is about something positive, about building a community and the idea that solidarity really is rooted in love. **Sophie Edelhart, JVP Student Organizer**



ZIONISM IS THE AIR YOU BREATHE Zionism is so rarely questioned in Israel by Israeli Jews. Growing up in Israel, even in a leftist family, I couldn't even question it because I couldn't even imagine any other way. Zionism is the air you breathe. In a way, it's not that different living here. But that's changing. Talking to Jews who grew up here in Jewish communities it's similar to what I grew up with, because American Jews have such an obvious allegiance to the Israeli idea. The battle now in Israeli politics is between old school, "respectable" Zionism, and what Bibi's doing now with the fascists and Kahanists. We need statements like this to open up a different way - there and here. **Asaf Calderon, JVP-NYC**

WE CAN ALL CHANGE OUR MINDS. As someone who grew up feeling marginalized both racially and politically as a non-white Jew who supports Palestinian liberation, the JVP statement and the process that led to it was deeply meaningful to me and is cause for great hope. I know it's possible for Jews from my mother's, and even grandmother's generation, to change their minds about a political position on which they once believed the very survival of their people depended. **Manijeh Nasrabadi, JVP Member-at-Large**

Read more from Manijeh and others activists about the statement in a special roundtable published in Jewish Currents - see jewishcurrents.org

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Fighting A Shameful Double Standard

JEWISH FEDERATIONS DENY JVP FUNDING - BUT NOT CANARY MISSION

by Roy J. Eidelson, PhD, JVP member and donor since 2014

Like many American Jews, I was deeply disturbed by news last fall that the Jewish Federation of San Francisco had approved a \$100,000 donation to Canary Mission from one of its donor-advised funds. Canary Mission operates anonymously to intimidate and harass critics of the Israeli government—especially college students and professors—by publishing online “dossiers” falsely smearing them as anti-Semites and racists.

But my exasperation also had a very personal element. My father established a donor-advised fund at the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia and when he passed away in 2014, the Federation held a service honoring him and others who helped sustain the Jewish community. At the time my siblings and I wrote:

We admired his commitment to social justice, which always extended beyond the narrow confines of religious denomination and ethnic background. He believed in defending the rights and welfare of all who struggle with poverty or discrimination. He strove to welcome and aid the stranger, including individuals and families seeking refuge from political and other forms of oppression.

To me, those beliefs are a perfect match for JVP, and so I directed a donation to JVP through the fund. But the Federation, citing JVP's support for the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement, refused to authorize that disbursement.

The double standard at work here is shameful. My family's desire to support nonviolent, grassroots efforts to counter oppression is out of bounds, while a sister organization facilitated funding to a group that nurtures hate. This betrays the Jewish values and universal principles my father cherished.

Even worse, this causes grave harm to a world in urgent need of repair. Yet we should not expect that the Federation and similar gatekeepers will soon change. Instead, we must become the visionary leaders that are so desperately needed today.



"We must become the visionary leaders that are so desperately needed today"

AND THERE'S EVEN MORE . . .

The more our work grows, the harder it is to report on anything close to all of it. Here are a few extra updates we wanted to make sure you saw. As always, our work is the product of collaboration with incredible allies all over the country and globe! ...and 2019 is just getting started... Our work has grown so much we can't report in depth on everything you're helping make happen in each newsletter. Here are some highlights we wanted to make sure you knew about:

JANUARY 3

The first two members of the House to endorse Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions are inaugurated: Rep Rashida Tlaib of Detroit, and Rep Ilhan Omar of Minneapolis.

JANUARY 29-31

JVP Student Network Retreat including campaign and base building trainings, mizrahi film night, and first ever Jews of Color space at a JVP student retreat.



FEBRUARY 15

Over 40 Shabbats for Angela Davis organized around the country to celebrate the 'indivisibility of justice.'

JANUARY 19

Groundbreaking New York Times Opinion Piece from Michelle Alexander (scholar and author of *The New Jim Crow*): Time to Break the Silence on Palestine



FEBRUARY 5

5 years after the American Studies Association (ASA) endorsed the BDS call, lawsuit against the Association claiming that the decision violated the organization's charter was dismissed!



FEBRUARY 5

cont... s.1 passes the Senate including the 'Anti-Boycott Act' - but a record 22 Senators vote against it!