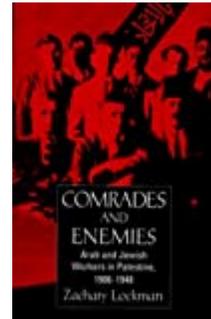




**Zachary Lockman.** *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine 1906-1948.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996. xvii + 440 pp. \$37.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-520-20419-5; \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-520-20259-7.



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## The Inherent Contradictions of Socialist-Zionism

At the center of Zachary Lockman's polemical and thought-provoking monograph is a simple question: did Palestinian and Israeli societies develop basically separately from each other with conflict being the only mode of interaction between the two, or did they in fact share countless mutually formative interactions which profoundly influenced the character of both? As the title suggests, Lockman makes a case in this book for the latter argument (or as he terms it the "relational history paradigm"), asserting that those who advocate the former "dual society paradigm", do so either because they lack the necessary language skills or because they are anchored to nationalist historical narratives which emphasize "primordial, self-contained and largely monolithic entities" (p.4).

To demonstrate his point, Lockman examines in considerable detail the histories of the Jewish and Arab labor movements prior to 1948 and how they both competed and collaborated with each other. The main focus of the book is on the Histadrut (The General Organization of Hebrew Workers in Eretz Yisrael) and its contradictory attempts to organize and displace Arab workers. Begin-

ning with a short treatment of the ideological origins of socialist-Zionism and continuing with a much more solid analysis of the thought and praxis of labor-Zionist during the British Mandate, Lockman looks into how the existence of an Arab working class challenged the core beliefs of those committed both to a Jewish homeland and to working class solidarity.

The book is particularly adept in exposing contradictory impulses in the labor-Zionist discourse. For example, the socialist-Zionist vision of a "normal" society dictated the creation of a strong Jewish working class and indeed many of the young socialist immigrants had arrived in Palestine with the hope of finding employment as laborers. However, being a worker in Palestine during the first decade of this century meant usually astonishingly low wages and appalling working conditions, which non-unionized Arab workers were willing to accept but most Jewish workers were intent to avoid. Therefore, to create a Jewish working class three interlocking strategies were devised: develop economic sectors which employed only Jewish workers (such as the Kibutzim and the Histadrut's own industrial complex), pressure other employ-

ers to hire more Hebrew labor and attempt to organize Arab workers so wages and working conditions would not be so atrocious. From a strictly trade union angle, the Histadrut-sponsored Arab unions were attractive to Arab workers since they had considerable experience in organizing, they offered a dense net of social services and they implicitly advanced the (mostly unrealized) hope of finding work in the Jewish sector. However, the fact that these unions were linked to Jewish national goals made long term membership impossible for Arab workers.

The most appealing aspect of *Comrades and Enemies* is its ability to present the fears, hopes and dilemmas of Arab workers. By utilizing sources such as pamphlets, oral interviews and memoirs, Lockman show that just like anyone else Arab workers were multi-dimensional human beings, very much aware of what was going on around them. It is unfortunate, therefore, that Lockman's considerable empathizing abilities are not extended also to Jewish workers. The fact that he ideologically opposes Zionism and sees it as no more than another version of 19th century European colonialism, does not mean that the thoughts and actions of Jewish workers should be presented in oversimplified and negative generalizations. Thus, for example, we are told on pages 132-133 that because few Jewish railway workers "took the trouble to learn Arabic, familiarize themselves with the ways of Palestine's indigenous majority or develop personal relationships with Arabs", they were unable to treat their Arab coworkers with respect, confront differences openly and eschew manipulation and dissembling". This does not only ignore the fact that Arab workers themselves did not learn Hebrew or acquaint themselves with Jewish culture and that the back-breaking work on the railroad was not the optimal environment to learn languages, but it contradicts Bulus Farah, the Palestinian communist and nationalist union leader, who was quoted

a few pages before saying that "the Jewish workers regarded their Arab coworkers with considerable respect, for they understood that the Arab workers possessed a great deal of professional skill, even if they were not on the level of the Jewish workers in terms of culture" (p.119).

Another basic problem is that Lockman overstates the case for "relational history". It is undoubtedly true that one gets many insights by examining other forms of interaction beside conflict and it is also true that a complete history of Mandatory Palestine should include these interactions. However, this does not imply that studying the two societies apart is either worthless or something that only a nationalist [bigot] would do. After all, Lockman himself admits that Zionism's core beliefs, its vision of itself and its sense of mission remained intact, despite the interactions with and challenges from Palestinian nationalism (p.363). Studying, therefore, these core beliefs within the context of Jewish society in Palestine and the Diaspora could not be a useless endeavor.

For whom, then, is *Comrades and Enemies* intended? It is definitely a must for those interested in labor history in Palestine. It deserves also the attention of historians of the Arab-Israeli conflict, precisely because it documents other forms of interaction. Students of Palestinian and Israeli history should probably familiarize themselves with "relational history" argument as presented in the introduction and the conclusion. Finally, historians of everyday life and those dealing with "history from below" will enjoy chapters three and four of the book which offer a micro-history case study of the railway workers.

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