

WHAT ARE PALESTINIAN POPULAR COMMITTEES?

Palestinian popular resistance has been a key feature of the Palestinian anti-colonial struggle, dating all the way back to the early 20th century. In more recent times, significant examples of popular organization and mobilization amongst Palestinians are the popular committees that were established during the 1970s and 1980s. The existence of these movements challenges the idea that people experiencing colonialism exist as constant victims waiting to be helped. They show the power of Palestinian standing together to resist the forces that harm them, despite Israel's efforts to fragment them.

Origins

Popular committees first formed in the West Bank and Gaza Strip after the 1967 War, emerging from Palestinian volunteer movements aiding the communities under Israeli occupation, across the areas of cultural resistance, agriculture, feminism, development, and health. The volunteers grew into regional networks working alongside political parties and officials, and helped encourage grassroots organizing as a way to resist settler colonialism and occupation by Israel. Despite Israel's attempts to suppress them, the popular committees continued to successfully establish and run schools, distribute food, and organize ongoing guards to alert Palestinians of Israeli attacks.



Although many popular committees do not exist in the same capacity today anymore, independent grassroots Palestinian movements still persist in anti-colonial resistance, continuing the collective organization against Israeli settler-colonialism.



Success

Many of the national resistance campaigns during the First Intifada, such as boycotts of Israeli goods and refusal to pay Israeli taxes, were initiated by popular committees of the 1970s and 1980s. At one point, the popular committees had become so effective that they were providing 60% of all the healthcare and disability services in the West Bank and Gaza.

NGO-ization

As a result of the popularity and success of the popular committees, Israel banned them in 1988. The signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 also contributed to the demobilization of popular committees, converting some of them from grassroots, anti-colonial bodies into NGOs that often had to depoliticize their views or adopt Westernized and neoliberal frameworks to secure funding to operating.