

Sparky; and of Bundy on his death watch, dropping his defiant and supercilious persona to ask a minister, "Do you really believe God forgives?" Perhaps it is only the imminence of death that provokes such changes of heart, but perhaps it is more the finality of punishment. Struggling to avoid the end, the criminal will not face up to what he has done; the

survival instinct crowds out remorse, not to mention moral reflection. A life term—provided that it truly meant life in prison—might accomplish even more than putting somebody dangerous and despicable away forever. In the cases of Goode and Bundy, it might have meant the fulfillment of what in their last moments they had barely begun. □

## THIS SIDE OF PEACE: A PERSONAL ACCOUNT

Hanan Ashrawi

Simon & Schuster/318 pages/\$25

reviewed by FAWAZ TURKI

**H**anan Ashrawi, who has always led what she calls "a sheltered life protected by privilege," became an instant celebrity in the United States after PLO leader Yasser Arafat appointed her spokeswoman of the Palestinian delegation at the Arab-Israeli peace talks in 1992. Now Ashrawi, a West Bank Palestinian, has written a memoir about her role in the struggle for freedom of "my people."

The "people" that Ashrawi has in mind, though, are exclusively her own—those from the PLO and those from her own class. Many Americans would perhaps be surprised to learn that the mention of her name to many of those for whom she is ostensibly a spokeswoman, would elicit merely a "Hanan who?" or an exasperated "Oh, *her!*" The four million Palestinians who live in exile—approximately two-thirds of the population—apparently do not merit her attention; in *This Side of Peace* she barely mentions them. Those who live in refugee camps elicit but two quick references: in one she speaks in passing of "our old family cleaning lady who lived in Jalazon camp," and in the other she tells us, without a hint of irony, about the

time she and her friends "worked" in the refugee camps "teaching consciousness raising."

Ashrawi writes about the bitter and incessant confrontations in the West Bank and Gaza over the last twenty-five years between Israelis and Palestinians. For those who never knew of them, and for those others who had long since stopped turning in nauseated disbelief at them, the stories are all here—the deportations, the collective punishment inflicted on whole villages, the blowing up of homes belonging to the families of suspected terrorists, the torture of prisoners, the gunning down of demonstrating students.

For decades, both sides soldiered on, as if history had poured fire into their blood. Yet a quarter-century after Golda Meir denied that a Palestinian people existed—while the Palestine National Charter denied Israelis their right to statehood—the leader of the hitherto untouchable PLO and the Israeli prime minister shook hands on the White House lawn in September 1993 to sign a peace agreement that bore the mark of history. Most of *This Side of Peace* takes up the story of the peace talks in Madrid and Washington, and her role as spokeswoman for the Palestinian delegation. Yet Ashrawi never explains the socio-political forces that brought this historic handshake about.

**T**he Gulf War shook long-held assumptions about Arab solidarity and the sense of exceptionalism that the Palestine conflict had had among Arabs for well over half a century. Ostracized by the rich Gulf states and denied financial aid, the PLO was broke after the war and teetered on collapse. For the Israelis it was a propitious moment to reach out with an offer the PLO could not refuse: a peace treaty, the signing of which would rescue Arafat and his organization from imminent oblivion and, above all, from the influential Hamas—whose power was sure to supplant his own unless he showed his people, or those few who still supported him, that he could produce. In return he would accept initial limited rule in Jericho and Gaza, and perhaps later in the entire West Bank. It was a far less appealing offer than the one he contemptuously turned down when it came packaged as the Camp David accords more than a decade before.

The emerging importance of Hamas is part of the recent Islamic fundamentalism that has afflicted the Arab world since the June War of 1967, when the Arab peoples' political values still derived primarily not from the Koran but from a medley of pan-Arabist secular ideologies: Baathism, Nasserism, socialism, and, in the Fertile Crescent, a parochial kind of Greater Syria nationalism. The generation of young Islamicists that grew up in the early 1960s believed nothing was more rooted in the collective Arab psyche, or more closely related to its quest for meaning, than the call for the unity of the Arab states and the emergence of the new Eden of Arabism. Islam was what was practiced at the mosque; but what was struggled for, and ardently believed in, was the secular movement to unite the Arabs by one ideology within a single territorial homeland—a homeland that included a Palestine liberated from the "Zionist usurpers" by the mighty Arab armies.

The Arabs felt tricked by their pan-Arabist ideologues after the cataclysmic June War, betrayed by social ideologies that proved to be hollow and worthless. What better mythology of hope to turn to, then, than the one that had grown out of the very bosom of Arab culture? Ironically, many of these Islamicists were born-again Moslems, originally secular ideologues who had fled to Islam after their secular ideologies had begun to appear impotent and irrelevant. Islam

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was the last great hope, a source of both identity and power that left no question unanswered, no answer in doubt: A corrupt and crippled society would be transformed into an Islamic one, thereby tapping into the meaning of divine truth.

But the problem is that there is no room for anyone who does not believe in this truth. One lives like a Moslem or else—and thus those who wished to transform the society according to Islam became openly avowed fascists. What Jacques Necker said of religion in fifteenth-century Europe—that it was “a heavy chain and a daily consolation”—might equally be said of those Palestinians today. Hamas appeals to the young not because it has developed a coherent or sophisticated political program—its goal of dismantling Israel is absurd—but because it presents what it calls a “clean” alternative to the corrupt and bumbling PLO. Hamas consoles those who see no way out, round, or through their social, economic, and political drudgery. Once the need for that consolation is gone, it is probable that Hamas will return to its harmless state before the onset of the *intifada* in 1987. The heavy chain that this group has around the necks of Palestinians will then be removed.

That, at least, has been the argument advanced by Palestinian democrats, who feel that neither Hamas nor the PLO can offer the free elections, democracy, and political pluralism that Palestinian society desperately needs to meet the challenges of the modern world.

Yet Ashrawi does not address herself to these questions. If she's aware of these problems, she is unwilling or unable to write about them in *This Side of Peace*. Where she ventures at analyzing the national mood in Palestinian society, her role as an uncritical PLO advocate precedes and determines her argument. Not surprisingly, there is not an unkind word here about the Arafat organization. Ashrawi believes that whatever modest gains the Palestinian people have made over the years—wresting control of their cause from the Arab governments, etching their name on the consciousness of the world, and the *intifada* itself—were all due to the astuteness of the PLO leadership.

In fact, the PLO has a long track record of corruption, ineptitude, and cynicism. Over the years it has squandered the political, financial, and human resources of the

Palestinian people with its *gaucheries* and buffoonery. Ashrawi, of course, admits to none of that. The vaudevillian Arafat is referred to throughout by his engaging *nom de guerre* of Abu Ammar, “the building father,” a title she utters with ease. He is “a legendary leader” who is “human and down to earth.” Others in the organization are treated equally softly: Akram Haniya is “extremely intelligent and creative with sharp political insights,” and Sami Mussalem, the chairman's chief of staff, “always maintained his humanity and equilibrium in spite of difficult and dangerous turns of fate.”

In the West Bank, such characters are called “family boys,” self-appointed leaders from the rich land-owning families like the Husseinis and the Nashashibis—families that since the 1920s have led the people of Palestine from one military disaster to another, one diplomatic defeat to another, and one act of social grief to another. A term such as “class enmity” seems odd to our American ears—it reeks of old-style Bolsheviks and hot-head rhetoric, remote from the social realities of American life. Yet in Palestinian society, where the stratification by class is rigid and mobility is difficult—where, in effect, the rich stay rich and the poor stay poor, from generation to generation—the two groups harbor the greatest resentment towards each other. “Class enmity” is real. And disenfranchised Palestinians—those tens of thousands trying to cross into Israel each morning to work for fifteen dollars a day—are irked and affronted by the spectacle of children of privilege leading them at the negotiating table.

Yet lead the negotiations they do, Ashrawi and her entourage, whose most notorious member is Faisal Hussein, grandson of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin Hussein. Whenever “Faisal and I” appear in this memoir to meet with James Baker or Warren Christopher, they always seem to humble the Secretaries of State with a Western witticism, a profound and pithy *bon mot*, some lyric retort dished out with robust clarity and urbane force.

Ashrawi tells us that she had gone “to speak in my people's voice,” but she—and, thus, the PLO—clearly went to the talks with little or no mandate to negotiate on behalf of the Palestinians. When the talks ended, in fact, with the way paved for the official negoti-

ations in Madrid and Washington, most major Palestinian political factions opposed the deal. “That left the largest faction, Fatah, [Arafat's group] and the independents,” she writes, “neither being monolithic or unanimous on the issue. Faisal and I felt vulnerable and exposed.”

Vulnerable and exposed, maybe—but that doesn't prevent her from indulging in a bit of old-fashioned Arabic *mobalagha*, or flowery boastfulness, claiming that she was “the speech bearer of our human reality, to unlock the chest of our silent words and with them the hearts and minds of men and women.” She is prone to such exaggeration. She writes that in 1988, when “the highly emotive and poetic Declaration of Independence was announced, Palestinians all over the world wept.” I don't know of any Palestinians who wept; I sure didn't. If the Palestinian Declaration of Independence was “emotive and poetic,” it was thanks to the Israeli Declaration of Independence, from which relevant sections were plagiarized by brazen PLO scribes.

Ultimately, *This Side of Peace* ends up, in a queer kind of way, leaving Palestinians less Palestinian than it had found them. It is not altogether frivolous to ask, for example, why she would want to write her first book in English, rather than in the native tongue of her “people.” Ashrawi writes in the borrowed dress of an alien tongue, making sure that her words will never strike root in the culture she pretends to represent—indeed, making sure that those people will not be able to read the “speech bearer of our human reality.”

How the pulverized Palestinian community can recover a sane position in the modern world is the subject of intense debate among Palestinians today—a debate going on in the refugee camps, in the exile community, in the places where intellectual émigrés find themselves around the world. The feeling is growing that the tired cant and lame banalities of the PLO should be thrown out, like broken toys. Palestinians are beginning to understand that the ultimate assault on them has been coming from within—an assault directed by people like Arafat, who have shown such facile contempt for journalists, intellectuals, and others who have dared to criticize his decrepit regime. Ashrawi is not part of that debate; a lot of Palestinians will tell you, in fact, that she is part of the problem. □

## THE POPULIST PERSUASION: AN AMERICAN HISTORY

Michael Kazin

BasicBooks/381 pages/\$24

reviewed by JOHN R. COYNE, JR.

Michael Kazin begins *The Populist Persuasion* with questions first posed by Carl Sandburg:

*Who shall speak for the people?  
who has the answers?  
where is the sure interpreter?  
who knows what to say?*

This is the subject of the book—the politicians who have presumed to speak for us in the idiom of populism, “a language whose speakers conceive of ordinary people as a noble assemblage not bounded narrowly by class, view their elite opponents as self-serving and undemocratic, and seek to mobilize the former against the latter.” That working definition does just fine in laying out the conflicts that the book will address: producers versus parasites, common folk versus elitists, Middle Americans versus the Intellectual Establishment, us versus the impudent snobs.

Kazin’s history begins with an analysis of the antebellum roots of populism, personified by Jefferson, Jackson, and Lincoln, each of whom “enabled post-bellum reformers to claim legitimate descent from a glorious past while they railed against those who wielded power unjustly in the present.” From there, Kazin moves to the nineteenth-century People’s Party, which called for a graduated income tax, unlimited coinage of gold and silver, nationalization of the railroads, and an attack on monopolies.

For the first three decades of this century, Kazin’s sweep is generally left-

ward, in a narrative complemented by finely drawn portraits of such populist leaders as Ignatius Donnelly, philosopher, scientist, and author of a utopian novel now read only by American literature majors; Tom Watson; and William Jennings “Boy” Bryan, whose cause and rhetoric seem so distant and musty today.

Kazin foreshadows populism’s “migration from left to right” in the 1940s with a compelling profile of Father Charles Coughlin, the radio priest who began by electrifying and energizing millions of Americans and ended a disgraced pro-fascist: “[His] loss of political strength was accompanied by the wail of lost ideals. Coughlin increasingly strummed the chords of a mournful Americanism at odds with both the mainstream version and his own sanguine past.” Elegant, evocative prose. And although Kazin identifies himself explicitly with the New Left (he was a volunteer in the Venceremos brigade, traveling illegally to Cuba to cut cane for Fidel), his narrative is remarkably free of bias.

This is true even of Kazin’s section on Sen. Joseph McCarthy, natural heir to much of Coughlin’s constituency, who represented “the best chance to close the gap between ideological conservatives and white working people (especially Catholics) that the Depression had opened up.” McCarthy managed to do just that, says Kazin, although his ultimate success depended on being able to “avoid the kind of scandalous slip-up to which maverick politicians are so vulnerable.” As we all know, he didn’t. But his cause enjoyed widespread political support, and the panic he created among his

intellectual opponents opened a deep cultural schism in the Democratic Party, which eventually became a chasm that contributed to the success of George Wallace, the rise of McGovernism, and the capture of the Democratic Party by increasingly exotic groups and interests in 1972.

In his treatment of Wallace, Kazin comes suspiciously close to admiration: “Wallace was the first serious presidential candidate in the twentieth century who identified himself as a working man. ‘Can a former truck driver married to a dime-store clerk and son of a dirt farmer be elected President?’ asked his 1968 campaign literature.” Wallace, argues Kazin, drove critics into reactions that cut to the center of what was devouring the Democratic left: elitist snobbery, all the more devastating because it was unconscious. He quotes Elizabeth Hardwick, writing in the *New York Review of Books*—flagship publication of both the old and new left—describing Wallace and his supporters “with a contempt that bordered on the pornographic”:

Wallace in his plastic-like, ill-cut suits, his greying drip-dry shirts, with his sour, dark, unprepossessing look, carrying the scent of hurry and hair oil: if he were not a figure, a star, he would be indistinguishable from the lowest of his crowd. . . . [His] natural home would seem to be a seedy hotel with a lot of people in the lobby, and his relaxation a cheap dinner.

As Kazin points out, Wallace “courted this elegant loathing,” delighting in attacks on bureaucrats, intellectuals, “pointy-headed college professors who couldn’t park their bicycles straight,” and the young New Leftists who tried to disrupt his rallies. “You young people seem to know a lot of four-letter words,” Wallace said. “But I have two . . . you don’t know: S-O-A-P and W-O-R-K.”

In the end, however, like many of the “maverick politicians” before him who lit populist fires, Wallace stretched his appeal to its limits. In 1972, although Wallace commanded a majority of primary delegates in a crowded field when he was shot on May 15, “the Wallace campaign seemed a disgruntled cry of protest rather than a fresh groundswell of formerly silent citizens

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