

Tlaib and Omar: A watershed moment in the struggle against imperialism and racism

written by Lev Koufax
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Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar

On Aug. 17, 2019, [Rep. Rashida Tlaib stood in front of a crowd in her hometown of Detroit.](#) The event was technically a public Shabbat called by the progressive Jewish community. However, a diverse and multinational crowd attended to show their support for the representative.

The most powerful aspect about Representative Tlaib's appearance was that she shouldn't have been there at all. She should have been visiting her grandmother, Muftiya, who lives in a small village in the occupied territory of the West Bank.

Since 1967, the apartheid state of Israel has violently and illegally occupied the entirety of the West Bank. For the past fifty-plus years, Palestinians in the West Bank have lived and struggled under the oppressive yoke of U.S. imperialism in the form of Israeli racism. Muftiya is one of such brave Palestinians.

So, why was Representative Tlaib not in the West Bank?

Tlaib had originally planned to visit her grandmother after she completed a diplomatic mission to the region with her fellow progressive representative, Ilhan Omar. In recent weeks, [both representatives have been under a vicious attack](#) from the right for their alleged "anti-semitic" positions. [As we have previously written,](#) these attacks are no more than a smokescreen to silence critiques of Israel's racist and genocidal policies.

Conspicuously enough, these same voices crying anti-Semitism at Omar and Tlaib were silent when a private prison correctional officer drove a truck through a crowd of Jewish people demonstrating against U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement concentration camps.

As the right-wing war of words against Omar and Tlaib reached a fever pitch, the fascist leader of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, [announced both representatives would be barred from entering Israel.](#) Significantly, the Israeli government made this

decision at the urging of the United States' own demagogue, President Donald J. Trump.

After a public outcry against the decision, Israel rescinded its decision to bar Tlaib, but only under the condition that she not express support for the Boycott, Divest and Sanction movement — colloquially known as “BDS.” The BDS movement has been a crucial force in bringing attention to Israeli apartheid.

Much to her credit, the representative rejected this insulting condition, stating, [“Visiting my grandmother under these oppressive conditions meant to humiliate me would break my grandmother’s heart.”](#) This statement is indicative of an important political moment for the progressive struggle in this country and around the globe. Representative Tlaib’s statement was an expression of nothing less than international working-class solidarity, and not just with her grandmother, but with all people suffering under U.S. imperialism and, in particular, Israeli apartheid.

This development is a groundbreaking one in terms of the political discourse in the U.S. The rise of two Muslim progressive representatives who are willing to take on the issue of Israel and Palestine in an honest and material way [is unprecedented.](#)

That is not to say that the Democratic Party transformed overnight into an anti-imperialist force. It is just to say that the contributions of Omar and Tlaib in the movement against U.S. imperialism and Israeli apartheid should not be ignored. Ultimately, their existence and rise to influence must be called what it is: a victory gained through the struggle of the working class against the wealthy at home and abroad.

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