

Ali Mustafa

I will never forget when I first met Ali Mustafa. It was September 2012, during my first year at York and just before I joined Students Against Israeli Apartheid (Ali was a former member), where he did a talk on his visit to Egypt. After he was done, he asked the audience for comments. Seeing no takers, I chimed in. Not knowing who I was, he was very impressed with my comments, and that was the beginning of our friendship.

I ran into him again at an event on the Quebec student strike that same month, and after that I remember seeing him on the day SAIA held a solidarity action with Gaza in Vari Hall in November 2012. I also saw him again at David McNally's "Monsters of the Market" launch in December of that year, and a week later when I joined the New Socialist Group, I discovered that he was also a member (or at least attended meetings).

In 2013, we would sometimes hang out, getting a drink after a Beit Zatounevent, or taking the streetcar together after NSG meetings. We would talk about all sorts of things, but mostly politics, from the state of the left here and abroad, to the British Socialist Workers Party scandal, and to the Arab Spring, which is when I learned he planned to visit Syria for the first time. He told me he planned to get into Syria from Turkey and that he would be embedded with Free Syrian Army units. This was just before an Israeli Apartheid Week 2013 event in March titled "Who's afraid of the Syrian Revolution" which featured activist Razan Ghazzawi on the history of the struggle of the Syrian people since 2011. The event, which was disrupted by the pro-Assad crowd, was the last time I saw Ali before he went to Syria the first time.

During his first trip to Syria, I would follow his Facebook account, keeping an eye out for updates, and look at all the

pictures he took. He was also interviewed by CTV News a few times. He returned to Toronto in May, but I didn't see him again until June, where he exhibited a lot of the photos he took in Syria, in a panel discussion on the struggle of the Syrian people at Beit Zatoun. The sight of all the destruction in Syria, coupled with photos of Syrians continuing to resist the terror of the Assad regime and building the foundations of a new and better society, was very moving. Getting a firsthand description of the Paris Commune and soviet-like popular assemblies that had sprung up throughout liberated areas of Syria was very inspiring.

The last time I saw Ali alive was on July 12, 2013. That night, he had debated a member of the Communist Party. Expecting the event to be a debate between Ali and someone who was critical of just the armed uprising, the event turned into a total character assassination and hit job on Ali and the Syrian Revolution. His opponent was not in the least bit critical of Assad. The audience was dominated by Stalinists and members of other pro-Assad groups. There were very few pro-revolution people in attendance and those who were there did not feel safe expressing their views. Ali was called a liar, and all of his pictures were alleged to being fake.

Following this incident, I went out with him and some of his friends, where he told me that he planned to visit Egypt again, this was just nine days after the coup against Morsi. The last memory I have of him is walking out of Future Cafe on Bloor Street towards Bathurst, and talking about Egyptian politics, and saying goodbye and telling him to stay safe as I walked back east along Bloor and he walked with his friend north along Bathurst.

This morning I awoke to find out that he was one of the latest victims of Bashar al-Assad. After more than six months in Egypt, he had visited Turkey and decided to go back to Syria. I didn't worry about him this time. If he had survived Syria the first time, and survived Egypt under Sisi, surely he'd be

okay?

But it was not meant to be.

Ali Mustafa was killed by Bashar al- Assad's armed forces, the same armed forces that have already killed tens of thousands of Syrians and counting.

Ali would want us to continue fighting for the Syrian people. He would want us to do whatever we can to help the people of Syria and express solidarity with them against Bashar al- Assad, the reactionary Saudi and Qatari backed Islamist groups, and imperialism, both American-Western and Russian, and most importantly, he would want us to defend the Syrian Revolution, against both the pro-Assad crowd, and also against those of the “a plague on both your houses” type.

In the 18 months I knew him, I considered him to be a great friend and comrade. I still cannot believe that I will never see him again.

Goodbye Ali,

You're gone, but not forgotten.