

Avoiding Rifts in the Nationalist Ranks

Events in Lebanon continue to underscore how crucial it is for the nationalist forces, Lebanese and Palestinian, to exercise clear vision in their struggle.

The Phalangist Party and their President, Amin Gemayel, continue to oppose political reform. It is their intention to keep the Lebanese crisis boiling until a time when Israeli or imperialist military backing is forthcoming. They would then act to ignite another round of war, hoping to reassert their lost dominance. Moreover, US imperialism's dramatic escalation of tension in the whole Middle East, by attacking Libya, will not leave Lebanon untouched. In the enemy forces' scenario, any rift among the nationalist forces will be exploited to the hilt.

On this backdrop, one can fully grasp the extreme danger spelled out by the fighting around the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut, which began on March 29th, between Palestinians and the Amal movement. The tragedy goes even beyond the fact that 35 people were killed, others injured and scores displaced from their homes - some for the umpteenth time. The danger is seen in the fact that this fighting lasted for over two weeks, although from the first days the Palestine National Salvation Front (PNSF) called for a meeting with the Amal leadership to resolve the situation peacefully. The fighting also continued despite an agreement on April 9th among Amal, the PNSF and the Lebanese National Unity Front, on concrete measures to insure a ceasefire. Coming after the attacks on Lebanese communists in Beirut and South Lebanon earlier this year, these clashes paint a grim picture.

The fighting at Sabra and Shatila did stop by April 16th, when a 200 man buffer force deployed around the camps, composed of members of the Progressive Socialist Party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, the Lebanese Communist Party and the Lebanese Baath Party. The ceasefire agreement stipulates that this force help the PNSF control security in the camps. Amal and the Palestinians would eliminate all «points

of tension» under the joint supervision of Syrian observers, and Amal and PNSF officials. All barricades should be removed to facilitate movement in and to the camps.

The ceasefire agreement allowed for evacuation of the dead and wounded from the camps. As such, it came none too soon. «If the fighting had continued for two or three days more, we could have had a real medical crisis,» said Amal Masri, an official in a Palestinian women's organization. A camp resident described the situation as follows: «The fighting was hell. Our homes were shelled with mortars. We must now recover those who fled, evacuate our injured and rebuild our homes.»

Who benefits?

While the deployment of the buffer force stopped all-out fighting, some tension has remained. The week after the ceasefire went into effect, two observers - one Palestinian and one Lebanese, from Amal - were killed by snipers. This only underscored the main point: Neither Amal, the PNSF, nor any nationalist Lebanese or Palestinian, stands to gain from such fighting. Rather there is a whole array of other forces that do.

On the political and mass level, the Palestinian right wing can draw benefits. Clashes in the nationalist ranks spread an atmosphere of despair and confusion as to who the real enemy is. This can be exploited by the right wing in its search for any political solution which, under the current balance of forces, means submitting to the US conditions.

It is the PNSF that has stood against these plans, and it deserves the support of all in the Lebanese nationalist camp, for thwarting an imperialist solution of the Palestinian cause is a prerequisite for ending the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon. Since 1982, new precedents have been set for the behavior of the Palestinian revolutionary

forces in Lebanon. Revolutionary Palestinians have fought alongside Lebanese patriots against the Israeli occupation, US intervention and fascist terror, for these battles cannot be separated from the Palestinian liberation struggle. It is inconceivable that any Lebanese force, aspiring to an independent and democratic Lebanon, should stand in the way of the Palestinian revolution's armed presence in Lebanon - to protect the refugee camps, to attack the Israeli occupation forces and join the war against fascist dominance.

It was to maintain this right, for the benefit of Palestinian and Lebanese national struggle, that the PNSF signed the agreement in Damascus last summer with the Amal movement, to end the 1985 camp war. The PNSF has adhered strictly to this agreement, and the outbreaks of fighting since show the importance of all cosigners taking the letter and spirit of this agreement seriously. If this does not happen, the full range of the enemy alliance stands to benefit, beginning with the Lebanese fascists and ranging to the Israeli occupiers and imperialist forces.

The battle at hand

In urging solid unity among the nationalist forces, we can point to several possible contingencies: One is a new round in the Lebanese civil war. Another is a US and/or Zionist attack on Syria, whether via Lebanon or otherwise. The latter possibility can never be entirely ruled out in view of Syria's steadfastness against the spread of Camp David in the area. The probability of such action seems enhanced by the US's openly declared intention of changing the map of Arab politics by toppling President Qaddafi.

Such possibilities obviously posit the need for solid Syrian-Palestinian-Lebanese nationalist alliance. There is another possibility that makes this need, if anything, more acute. In view of past failure to control Lebanon through outright intervention, US imperialism and 'Israel' may judge it best to refrain from all-out military action, instead continuing the present war of attrition, hoping to wear down the nerves and morale of the masses. We have already seen this tendency, which is full of localized aggressive acts.