

Diary of the Camp War

The Zionist invasion of Lebanon four years ago failed to achieve its stated aims. One of the signs of this failure is that the Palestinians in the camps have been able to rearm themselves, for self-defense and for contributing to the revolution. Reactionary sections of the Amal movement, however, have taken up where the Zionists failed, provoking recurrent battles aimed at eliminating the Palestinian armed presence in Beirut. Below we present a chronology of the latest round of fighting around the Sabra-Shatila and Bourj Al Barajneh refugee camps, based on daily reports *Democratic Palestine* has received from Beirut.

On May 18th, the area around the Palestinian camps was calm. Life went on as normal, although reactionary forces in Amal had been continuously trying to create friction. Then, at 7 p.m., Hani Al Harakeh, one of these reactionary elements, tried to murder a Palestinian in Bourj Al Barajneh. Tension mounted and there was gunfire, but the incident was contained.

The next day in the afternoon, Hani Al Harakeh again proceeded to cause friction around Bourj Al Barajneh. Sniper fire was directed towards the camp, and two Palestinians were injured. In the evening, Amal concentrated a large number of forces on the east side of Shatila and put up heavy fortifications on the south side. There was an attempt to reduce tension by the follow-up committee which is composed of Lebanese nationalists, representatives of the Palestine National Salvation Front, Amal and Syrian officers, charged with observing the situation around the camps. At 8 p.m. a hand grenade was thrown into Shatila, injuring two comrades of the PFLP. These war preparations were coordinated with an increase of tension around Bourj Al Barajneh. At 7:30 p.m. clashes broke out; light and medium weapons were used, including mortars. A ceasefire was reached but sniping continued from Amal's side, injuring six Palestinians.

On May 20th, the situation was relatively calm despite ceasefire violations by Amal forces around the camps. However, Amal escalated tension in West Beirut. Clashes occurred between Amal and the Progressive Socialist Party after the former murdered a local PSP leader.

On May 21st, life returned to normal around Bourj Al Barajneh, but several grenades were thrown at Shatila. The Palestine National Salvation Front issued a communique, rejecting any fighting within the nationalist ranks in Lebanon, declaring that such side-battles serve Amin Gemayel and the Zionist-imperialist-fascist project. The reactionary sections of Amal responded to this communique the next day, by shelling Shatila and reigniting the battle. The security committee intervened to stop the clashes.

On May 23rd, Amal continued fortification of its positions around Shatila, using reinforced concrete. Amal then

ignited a battle around Bourj Al Barajneh, using all types of weapons. In the afternoon, clashes began around Shatila, the ceasefire having been shattered by Amal's repeated violations.

Amal continued its fortifications work around Shatila on May 24th, bringing in truckloads of sand. At 4 p.m. Amal gunfire murdered a Palestinian child, Ali Yahya Zamzam, nine years old. Tension mounted; clashes erupted and continued the next day. On the 26th of May, there was heavy fighting around Bourj Al Barajneh, and the Palestinian forces gained some positions. In West Beirut, Amal continued its harassment of the non-Shiite population. In a press communique, the popular committee of Bourj Al Barajneh declared that the ongoing tension was the result of Amal's shelling the camp, and that Amal had not honored the ceasefire. The popular committee charged that Amal had prepared a plot against the camps.

Fighting continued on May 27th. Amal escalated the battle, using tanks, 82mm mortars and 23mm machine guns. The Palestinian fighters continued to defend the camps, united in their determination to confront all aggression. Amal continued heavy shelling the next day, rupturing all ceasefire agreements. Bourj Al Barajneh was shelled in the late afternoon with heavy mortars (60, 82, 120mm), 106mm artillery and RPG's, from Amal tank positions on the northeast side of the camp. Amal also escalated tension in West Beirut, especially with the February 6th Movement. The popular committee of Sabra-Shatila issued a communique stressing that the Palestinians in the camps are part of the nationalist ranks, and the Palestinian armed presence in Beirut is only a threat to the Zionist-imperialist-fascist project. The popular committee also stressed the Palestinians' right to defend themselves, and called on Amal to honor the ceasefire. They called on the nationalist forces to work to put an end to the war.

Amal's aggression continued on May 29-30th. Amal moreover tightened the siege around the camps, preventing medical personnel from evacuating the dead and wounded. Nonetheless, reports from the camps described the Palestinians' morale as high. On May 30th, there were clashes between Amal

and Hezbollah, as Amal attempted to assert its hegemony in West Beirut.

March 31st began with heavy shelling of the camps, as Amal prepared to advance. At 6 a.m., after two hours of intense shelling, the reactionary forces of Amal tried to advance in a coordinated attack on all fronts. The heroic Palestinian forces not only repelled Amal's attack, but also improved their own positions. Amal's fighters retreated, having suffered casualties. Losses were heavy on both sides. There were six Palestinians martyred and 67 injured.

The camp war continued on June 1st. The buffer force was unable to take its positions because of Amal's continued aggression. Palestinian losses were one martyr and 23 injured. A new element was injected when clashes broke out in West Beirut, between the February 6th Movement and Amal, showing Amal's intention to put down any force not willing to submit to its hegemony.

Amal continued its aggression on June 2nd. Mortar fire and sniping around Shatila grew into intense fighting as the day wore on. Palestinian losses were four martyrs and 27 injured. The clashes in West Beirut intensified as Amal attacked the February 6th Movement and the PSP. The Palestine National Salvation Front distributed the third issue of its new daily entitled *Steadfastness of the Camps*.

On June 3rd, there was a relative decline in the fighting around the camps, while the battle in West Beirut made the headlines. Fighting broke out between the parties of the Lebanese national movement on the one hand and Amal on the other, using all weapons. By the next day, Amal had taken control of the disputed areas of West Beirut, for it has superior fire power due to the support it has received from regional forces and its alliance with the Lebanese Army 6th Brigade which is stationed in West Beirut. In the aftermath, Amal militiamen swept through the areas where the battle had raged, looting and kidnapping innocent citizens. The homes of Palestinians living outside the camps were stormed. Fighting intensified around the camps again; three Palestinians were martyred and eight injured. Heavy fighting continued around the camps June 5-6th. The Palestinian forces continued to exhibit