

Aftermath of the 1986 Camp War

Interview with Comrade Abu Maher Yamani

In order to clarify the causes and effects of the latest round of fighting in the camps of Beirut, we interviewed Comrade Abu Maher Yamani in early July. Abu Maher is a member of the PFLP Politbureau, Secretary of the Palestine National Salvation Front (PNSF) and a member of the legitimate PLO Executive Committee. He is particularly qualified to speak on this subject for he was personally involved in reaching the most recent ceasefire agreement on June 14th, and one of the first Palestinian leaders to enter the camps afterwards.



Sabra camp, Beirut, June 1986

What are the reasons for the renewal of the camp war in the past few months?

The main reason was the Amal movement's lack of commitment to the terms of the Damascus agreement that was concluded on June 17, 1985, after the camp war begun by Amal on May 20th of the same year. Amal did not abide by clause two of the agreement which stipulated that they should withdraw their fighters from the area around the camps, back to the positions they had before the fighting broke out. Furthermore, the (Lebanese Army) Sixth Brigade did not return to their duties as practiced before the 1985 camp war, as was specified in clause three of the agreement. Rather they continued to support Amal in blockading the camps. Nor did Amal abide by clause five of the Damascus agreement which called for conducting mass gatherings and reconciliation to end the hostility caused by the war. Furthermore, the joint coordination committee, named in clause nine of the agreement, was unable to perform its duties on the political, social and security levels; it was unable to resolve pressing problems.

Amal not only continued to besiege the camps. They also stormed the houses of Palestinians in the surrounding quarters, arresting many and killing many others. One of the most bloody incidents was the autumn 1985 massacre in the Hureik quarter, enacted by spiteful elements of Amal. In this massacre, many Palestinian children and elderly were killed, and many homes were burned down.

Amal uses Arafat's group as justification for striking the camps. Can you comment on this?

We cannot deny the presence of Arafat's group in the camps, but there is a big difference between their presence and their activities. Of course, there are political differences between the deviationist trend of Arafat and his followers on the one hand and the PNSF on the other. However, despite this, the base of Arafat's supporters did not violate the Damascus agreement

between Amal and the Salvation Front. This base abided by the ceasefire. It is true that Arafat and members of his central committee were making provocative statements to the media, but their maneuvers and public statements were not in conformity with the position of their base in the camps. Their base even condemned the meeting between some Fatah Central Committee members and Amin Gemayel.

Arafat benefitted from the camp war. The war gave him room to maneuver and to speak about the Palestinian situation in Beirut, from his particular point of view, on the Arab level and internationally. Amal uses the activities of Arafat's group in the camp as the main justification for renewing the war, continuing the siege and shelling the camps. Yet when shelling the camps, Amal does not differentiate between Arafat's group and other groups and people that oppose him. Besides, if Amal had been committed to the June 1985 agreement, Arafat's men would not have found a justification for their moves and statements.

What are the dimensions of this war? What are its effects on the morale of the Palestinian masses in Lebanon, and on their material conditions?

The war definitely has negative effects on the Palestinian masses in Lebanon. The Palestinians lost many of their children and fighters in this battle of self-defense. Those fighters had participated in the confrontation against the Zionist enemy in Lebanon. Those children would have become fighters and played a role in future battles with the enemy. This war also left many injured and crippled, and these people will remain a mark of disgrace in the history of relations between the Palestinian masses and the Amal movement. Most importantly, a state of spite, resentment and animosity was created between two peoples who are supposed to be allies, uniting all their efforts and guns against the common enemy-Zionism, its agents and supporters.