

Diary of the Camp War

South Lebanon Rashidiya

All efforts to implement a ceasefire agreement between Amal and the Palestinians in South Lebanon failed, as Amal consistently escalated the war. All indications point to the fact that Amal is determined to impose its schemes, spreading its unholy war to all the Palestinian camps in Lebanon. This aims to liquidate the Palestinian armed presence, in order to impose Amal's dominance over as much of Lebanon as possible. In this way, Amal strives to gain a bigger share in the government in a sectarian redivision of power in Lebanon.

Amal provoked the situation on September 5th, when 30 of its militants stormed Al Qasmeyeh camp, on the road between Tyre and Sidon. Many houses in the camp were barbarically stormed in a search for weapons. Many houses were destroyed, and dozens of young men were rounded up. Two days later, on Sept. 7th, Amal elements proceeded to Burj Al Shamali camp, near Tyre. Houses were stormed and searched. Everyone in the streets of the camp was barbarically beaten; ten men were arrested, three of them members of the local popular committee. All attempts by the popular committees in both camps, to recover the detainees, failed.

As we wrote about in «Democratic Palestine» no.19, groups from Amal installed a road block at the entrance to Rashidiya and held back a bulldozer and trucks loaded with building material for a hospital project in the camp. Later in the day, these were destroyed, on the pretext that they were being used to build military fortifications. Amal used humiliating methods to search everyone entering or leaving the camp. Each day, many were beaten and detained.

The next day, Amal brought one of their injured fighters to Jabal A'amel hospital in Al Bus camp to be operated on. Along with the patient, they brought Palestinian and Lebanese prisoners, to force them to donate blood, but the doctors refused this.

Amal's practices became more and more unbearable. A delegation of the security committee that includes representatives from Amal and the Palestine National Salvation Front, arrived in Rashidiya camp to meet with the popular committee and listen to their complaints. They heard the story of continuous detentions of Palestinians, confiscation of foodstuffs at the road-

block, harassment of shopowners, torture of prisoners, and storming and destruction of houses. Amal's representatives in the security committee promised not to harass any Palestinian, inside or outside Rashidiya, unless they are suspected of security violations. They also promised to allow foodstuffs, and medical and construction materials to enter the camp.

After the security committee left the camp the next day, Amal did not live up to their promises, but resumed their barbaric practices which greatly resemble the practices of the Zionist enemy. Many houses were stormed on Sept. 10th, in a search for weapons.

This situation went on for five days, requiring a second meeting with Amal's leadership. On Sept. 15th, a meeting was held in Damascus between leaders of the PNSF in the South, representatives from the Lebanese National Unity Front, the Political Council of Sidon, Syrian observers and Amal. Discussion focused on points of joint action between the PNSF and the Amal movement. Amal's leadership agreed on the following points:

1. giving the popular committee the role of resolving the problems of the Palestinian masses in the camps, and regulating relations with Amal in the South;
2. not to discriminate between Lebanese and Palestinians in terms of political activities, freedom of speech, work and transportation; and to facilitate transportation for Palestinians;
3. to give strict orders to Amal's security not to beat and torture Palestinian prisoners;
4. to release all political prisoners in the South immediately;
5. to allow foodstuffs, medical and building material to enter Rashidiya;
6. to give all facilities possible to the fighters in order that they can combat the Zionist enemy;
7. to deal with the expansion of armed presence in Sidon and nearby areas through a joint military plan.

The Amal cadres who signed the agreement promised to abide by it. The situation was relatively calm for two weeks despite minor violations by the Amal forces around the camp, but this was the calm before the storm.

AMAL IGNITES THE WAR

On Oct. 1st, early in the morning, Amal ignited the battle by subjecting the camp to heavy firing. The fighters charged with defending the camp fired back to force Amal to stop. Half an hour later, Amal started shelling the camp, using all types of weapons. The deteriorating situation called for an emergency meeting. The PNSF and the popular committee met for long hours. There were communications with the nationalist leaders of Sidon and the Syrian observers. A second emergency meeting took place that same day between the PNSF and the Lebanese National Unity Front, in order to coordinate steps to prevent the deteriorating situation in the Tyre area.

A third meeting was immediately called for, this time of Sidon's Political Council, which the PNSF and Amal attended. It was decided to send a high-level delegation to the area to control the situation. At the same time a fourth meeting was held with Red Cross officials in the South. The Red Cross failed to extract Amal's permission to enter the camp with medical aid and to transport the injured to a Sidon hospital.

During a short ceasefire, the popular committee met with Amal cadres outside the camp. Amal demanded that the popular committee surrender all heavy weapons before discussing a ceasefire. Amal continued to shell the camp heavily for three days, using 60mm mortars and different caliber machine guns. Amal gunfire murdered one Palestinian and injured another on Oct. 3rd. In retaliation, a group of Palestinian fighters attacked the roadblock, and destroyed a vehicle belonging to Amal.

In the evening Amal shelled the camp for four continuous hours. Early in the morning of Oct. 4th, the shelling stopped, but there was sniping for several hours, injuring one Palestinian. At 3:30 p.m. Amal opened fire on the camp again, using 107/81mm mortars, RPG's and 23 mm machine guns; three Palestinians were injured and several houses were destroyed. At 4 a.m. the next day, there was an hour of shelling