

homes. As of mid-March, 47 women had been wounded and eight martyred.

## RASHIDIYEH

In Rashidiyeh camp in the South, another version of Amal's brutality prevails. For tactical reasons, tied to the conditions imposed on Amal with the Palestinian withdrawal from Maghdousheh, Nabih Berri's gangs have made a pretense of being lenient by allowing women to leave and reenter the camp each day, to procure food supplies. This, however, did not stop Amal's militiamen from reverting to other methods of harassment. Women were not allowed to carry more than three kilos of food into the camp. Flour, newspapers, batteries, heating fuel and kerosene for lanterns were not allowed in. A special checkpoint was set up outside the camp to search women. At times, their money and food supplies would be confiscated for no reason.

In the first week of March, Amal militiamen ambushed and murdered three camp residents and threw their bodies in a nearby field. Under various pretexts, homes of Palestinians are stormed and people arrested. In the past couple of weeks, four women were arrested in this way. Then, on March 19th, Amal issued new directives: Women are not allowed to leave the camp more than twice a month - surely a prelude to more horrendous measures to come.

## FALSE MEDIA

No less atrocious is the media campaign spotlighting 'truckloads of supplies' entering the camps. Not only are Amal's gestures of lifting the blockade on food and medical supplies ludicrous; they are utterly false. At times, Amal pretends that the trucks are not let in because the roads to the camps are unfit for passage; thus, they condition entry of supplies on the Palestinians paying for clearing the road. At other times, the Amal militiamen help themselves to the medical and food supplies, despite the fact that two or three truckloads barely cover the needs of the camps for a couple of days. (Burj Al Barajneh's population is 20-30,000, as is Rashidiyeh's.) Moreover, the bulk of these supplies are dried milk, flour, yeast and sugar. Fresh fruits and vegetables are delicacies not enjoyed by the camp residents. This has caused

scurvy to crop up in Burj Al Barajneh, a disease resulting from severe lack of vitamin C, marked by spongy gums, loosening of the teeth, and bleeding in to the skin and mucous membranes.

In Rashidiyeh, Amal's militiamen go through the trouble of fabricating situations which prevent the entry of food supplies. In the camps of West Beirut, their approach is more direct, reflecting their true intentions. Every instance of unloading supplies in Burj Al Barajneh and Shatila is accompanied by military aggression. On March 1st, Amal shot at the tires of two supply trucks being unloaded in Shatila; four Palestinians were wounded. On the same day, Amal started to shell Burj Al Barajneh as another two truckloads entered. Several people were wounded, being caught unexpectedly in the midst of this brutal attack. The next day, another attempt to unload supplies of flour and milk was given the same treatment; one Palestinian was martyred and three wounded. On March 4th, a woman carrying supplies was shot dead.

Amal is not satisfied with exercising direct brutality against innocent Palestinian civilians, but resorts to deceitful tactics as well. In one incident, Amal set up a point where it offered to sell 25-liter containers of kerosene to Burj Al Barajneh inhabitants (four times the going price on the market). The next day people came in hopes that this fuel would be made available again, and were caught unawares by machine gun fire. Two women and a child were wounded. On March 9th, another two women were wounded so seriously that they later died.

In protest, the Salvation Front committee urged women not to leave the camps, even if Amal declared that they were allowed to. Clearly, Amal's tactics aim at allowing people to gather, making it possible to mow down the largest number of victims at one blow. Again, Amal made a show of providing fuel supplies and brought in journalists to cover their gesture. However, the great majority of women adhered to the Salvation Front committee's call, thus foiling Amal's theatrical ploy.

On March 10th, the unloading of trucks was again hampered by machine gun fire on Shatila and Burj Al Barajneh. In Shatila, three Palestinians were wounded; in Burj, nine. Moreover, the trucks were subjected to sniper fire to

prevent anyone from approaching. The same day, the popular committee of Burj Al Barajneh petitioned all religious figures to take action against these atrocities. Ironically enough, two days later Amal offered to renovate the mosque destroyed in Rashidiyeh.

On the backdrop of all this ugliness, Israeli fighter planes make regular surveillance flights while their gunboats float menacingly offshore, the silence of their guns reflecting implicit approval. On March 20th, and again on March 23rd, the Israeli air force went into action to Amal's advantage, bombing Palestinian positions east of Sidon.

## SECTARIANISM VS. NATIONAL STRUGGLE

The tactics to gain time, used by Amal and those who support the plan to eliminate Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon, no longer come as a surprise to anyone. Amal now ties the lifting of the siege on the Palestinian camps, to Palestinian withdrawal from Janasnayeh, Ain Al Dulub and Al Qrayeh, three villages east of Sidon. This clearly indicates Amal's intention to ignite a new situation which would hinder any solution contrary to its interests. Amal's new conditions for Palestinian withdrawal from these three villages is not connected to the issue of Maghdousheh. Palestinian forces entered Maghdousheh because of the deperate need to force Amal to lift the siege on Rashidiyeh. However, Palestinian presence in the other three villages east of Sidon dates back to the time when the Zionist and fascist forces withdrew from the area, under the pressure of the Lebanese National Resistance.

It is evident that Amal wishes to create a new situation which would enable it to capitalize further on the Palestinian tragedy, i.e., to push for more concessions, or possibly to impose a siege on Ain Al Hilweh camp and find excuses for continuing the siege on other Palestinian camps. Moreover, the clashes between Amal's militiamen, and those of the Progressive Socialist Party and the Lebanese Communist Party, substantiate the fact that Amal is a sectarian force no less a threat to the Lebanese national democratic project than other sectarian forces.