

An End to the Camp War?

Throughout the last weeks of March and the beginning of April, the aggression of Amal and its supporters rose to brutal, new heights. Meanwhile, the people in the besieged camps of Beirut, joined by other Palestinians, and national and democratic organizations, staged an effective protest campaign. Not only were they laying their lives on the line to secure the basic needs for survival, Palestinians were also raising their voices high in protest of the inhuman situation.

In the first week of April, Syrian troops were deployed in the camps of Burj Al Barajneh and Shatila, six weeks after their entry into West Beirut. The horrendous siege came to an end. Although Amal initially violated the ceasefire it had agreed upon, sufficient quantities of food and medical supplies entered the camps to relieve the thousands of war-weary Palestinians after their heroic steadfastness.

Hopefully this marks the prelude to resolving the issue of the Palestinians' rights to self-defense and armed struggle against Zionist aggression from Lebanese soil. However, keeping in mind Amal's numerous violations of previous agreements, one reserves the right to be skeptical, no matter how much optimism the present events may inspire. There are a number of indications that a comprehensive solution has yet to be achieved, such as the recent outbursts of firing in the area of Kafr Fallous and Maghdousheh, and Amal's continued insistence on Palestinian withdrawal from three villages east of Sidon.

The Palestinians have shown their seriousness about reaching a stable solution that would relieve the camp population of future threats. This was seen in Palestinian withdrawal from Maghdousheh and the nearby village, Zaghadraya, and in the intense efforts in Sidon among Palestinian organizations and the Popular Nasserite Organization, to resolve the question of the three villages - Janasnaya, Ain Al Dulub and Al Quraya. In contrast, Amal has shown inflexibility and continued to fabricate new conditions, exposing its intention to continue the campaign against Palestinians, despite

the present lull in the fighting. Despite Amal's efforts to appear more flexible, events in the last days of March and the beginning of April, up to the first hours of the Syrian deployment, further exposed Amal's true intentions.

PROTESTING THE PASSAGE OF DEATH

The end of March and beginning of April witnessed unprecedented military attacks on Burj Al Barajneh, especially at the Jalbout entrance which became widely known as the 'Passage of Death'. Amal snipers continued to use men, women, children and the elderly as targets in their grotesque game of death. In March, this passage was opened more than fifteen times. Each and every time, Palestinian women who dared to venture through it were martyred or wounded. A Palestine National Salvation Front (PNSF) communique stated that more than 35 had been martyred and seventy wounded at this point. On March 28th, Amal militiamen tried to infiltrate into Burj Al Barajneh through this entry, but were repulsed by Palestinian revolutionaries. In the two weeks before the Syrian entry into the camps, four more Palestinians were killed and eighteen wounded at this ill-fated path. On April 5th, one day before the Syrian deployment and the day when Amal had agreed to uphold the ceasefire, three Palestinians were wounded by sniper bullets in the 'Passage of Death'. Moreover, Amal gangsters confiscated food supplies and thousands of Lebanese pounds which were supposed to be distributed to families of martyrs. There were numerous incidents where Palestinian women were beaten up.

Palestinians outside the camps were also subject to Amal's tyranny. Many were kidnapped, only to be found murdered in some side street or alley. In March, one Palestinian was found outside the vicinity of Shatila with fourteen wounds from a machine gun shot at close range. Another Palestinian who lived outside Burj Al Barajneh was kidnapped by Amal. His home was stormed and his belongings stolen in front of the family; he was later found dead in a side street.

In protest of Amal's atrocities, 150 women marched out of Burj Al Barajneh on March 25th, to join 3,000 who had gathered at the airport road. Amal's response was a barrage of fire which left six martyrs and seven wounded in its trail. On March 29th, Palestinian women gathered in front of the mosque in Shatila, to march in protest of the siege. Amal enacted another massacre. When the women got within range, a barrage of machine gun fire was let loose; five women were martyred and many others wounded. Those whom the bullets luckily missed were scattered into the alleyways, unable to find secure shelter or to drag the dead and wounded away from Amal's deadly shooting range.

On April 3rd, after much negotiation and two days before the Syrians deployed in Shatila, Amal conceded to allow one of two supply trucks into Shatila. (The other one Amal confiscated for its own use.) After the truck entered and people had gathered to get their share, Amal and the Lebanese Army's 6th Brigade attacked with rockets, setting the truck ablaze. Three Palestinians were killed on the spot - two of them children, one and a half, and three years old. Twenty others were wounded, in addition to the many who suffered serious burns as they tried to salvage bags of rice and flour.

DESPERATE CONDITIONS

The desperation that led people to risk their lives for some bags of rice and flour can be understood on the background of Shatila's critical situation. Five days before, five of the