

Lebanon

Cancellation of the Cairo Agreement

On May 21st, the Lebanese parliament 'unanimously' passed a resolution calling for cancellation of the Cairo agreement signed by the Lebanese government and the PLO in 1969, under the auspices of Egypt. However, a few notes about the nature of this parliament are in order. Elections were last held in 1972. Of the 100 deputies elected at that time, only 85 are still living. Of these, only 44 were present at the session. Together with the speaker of the house, Hussein Husseini, they barely constituted the quorum necessary to pass any resolution. Along with cancelling the Cairo agreement, the parliament passed a resolution cancelling the authorization granted to the Lebanese government in 1983 to conclude the May 17th agreement with 'Israel'.

The very fact that the parliament, which otherwise so seldom meets, could convene at this particular time makes it apparent that a deal had been struck whereby the two agreements would be cancelled at the same session. This deal aimed to equate the Cairo agreement with the infamous May 17th agreement of capitulation to 'Israel'. Equating the two was an attempt by the 'humble' chamber of deputies to indicate that the price for Lebanese patriots having abrogated the May 17th agreement was cancellation of the Cairo agreement.

The Cairo agreement was signed on November 3, 1969, between the Lebanese Army's commander, Emil Boustani, and the PLO's chairman, Yasir Arafat. It was intended to regulate the Palestinian people's military and civilian presence in Lebanon. The first clause stipulated the «right of the Palestinians living in Lebanon to work, residence and relocation.» The second article stated that «local committees formed by the Palestinians in the camps would be established to safeguard the interests of these Palestinians, in cooperation with the local authorities in the domain of Lebanese sovereignty.» The other aspect of the accord concerns military presence, regulating Palestinian military activities in the camps and in the South, in cooperation with the

Lebanese authorities. Given the conditions of the civil war in Lebanon, where Palestinian camps have been repeatedly attacked by 'Israel', the Lebanese fascists and more recently other sectarian forces, the civilian aspect of the accord has no meaning whatsoever without the military aspect.

REACTIONS

Before discussing the why's of the Cairo agreement's cancellation, a quick review of the reactions to this may provide an initial understanding of the reasons for the cancellation. The deputies who took it upon themselves to cancel the Cairo agreement represent two main trends. The first is the trend supportive of the Amal movement. The second is supportive of the Phalangist Party and Lebanese Forces militia. The cancellation is thus one result of the undeclared alliance between these two trends, based on sectarianism and antagonism to any Palestinian presence in Lebanon.

The fascist forces were quick to welcome the 'historical' resolution of the parliament. Phalangist Party President George Saadeh viewed the cancellation as a «materialization of the true Lebanese people's will...» In turn, Amal's reaction was an extension of their policies and role. Amal President Nabih Berri justified the parliament's decision as «self-defense»! Other Amal officials voiced their approval of the decision as a step towards ending Lebanon's calamities!

In contrast, the Lebanese patriotic and progressive forces voiced their opposition to this decision, in line with their nationalist policies. The parliament's decision came as a shock to Lebanese patriotic circles. Walid Jumblatt, president of the Progressive Socialist Party, said that «cancelling the Cairo agreement means telling the Palestinians to throw down their guns and submit to massacres.» Other nationalist forces responded in a similar vein, considering the cancellation as a conspiracy against the Palestinian people. The Lebanese Communist Party termed the cancellation a «free gift to the internal and external enemies who

are betting on the US-Zionist projects and new Israeli aggression to tip the balance of forces in their favor.»

WHAT THE CANCELLATION MEANS

The sectarian alliance that succeeded in cancelling the agreement had a number of interrelated motives: First, they aimed at achieving a political victory to make up for the consistent military defeats they have suffered. This political victory is intended to lay the groundwork - now a legal groundwork - for fighting the Palestinian presence in Lebanon, military and civilian alike.

Second, by cancelling the accord, the sectarian alliance hopes to eliminate an obstacle to a sectarian solution in Lebanon. The Palestinians are considered an obstacle because of their alliance with the Lebanese nationalist and progressive forces, and their history of participation in the struggle in Lebanon against the fascist forces, imperialist domination and Zionist occupation. At the same time, the cancellation would pave the way for a deal on the regional level, that would grant the Zionist enemy the security arrangements it desires.

Third, in view of the possibility of the convening of an international conference on the Middle East, the sectarian forces aim to cut the PLO's influence down to size, to prevent it from attaining an independent and special role in such a conference. The PLO's presence in South Lebanon gives it military and political weight considered undesirable by other parties promoting the conference, i.e., the US, 'Israel' and Arab reaction.

Fourth, the cancellation is a gratuity offered to the US and 'Israel' in an attempt to stop the pressure which the imperialist-Zionist alliance exerts on Lebanon to stop the growth of the Lebanese national resistance in the South, and the return of greater numbers of Palestinian fighters who participate in this resistance struggle.

Fifth, and possibly the main issue, is that it is not simply an agreement that has been cancelled. Rather the intent is to cancel the entire phase that produced it, namely the phase of the rise of the Arab national liberation movement in the region as a whole.

The cancellation of the Cairo agreement occurred a few weeks after the unifying Palestinian National