

Nationalist Victory

REAGAN PLAYS WITH FIRE AND GETS BURNED

US imperialism and the Amin Gemayel government failed to heed the warning sounded by the nationalist forces in the September '83 mountain war. Their political vision blinded them to the depth of the power embodied in the *de facto* popular authority maintained in Beirut's southern suburbs. Most of all, they underestimated the breadth of the popular rage smoldering against their plans to make Lebanon a US-Zionist protectorate and gateway for spreading Camp David in the area. Stepped-up arrest campaigns in January, adding several hundred Palestinians and Lebanese to the fascists' dungeons, had only realerted the population to the internal consequences of the regime's chosen course.

The enemy imagined that the Lebanese Army could make a clean sweep, ending the war of attrition with the nationalist forces, squashing West Beirut under its heel and severing the corridor connecting Beirut's southern districts to the nationalist-controlled areas in the surrounding hills. To this end, an offensive was planned for late January or early February, by the regime in coordination with its US and French allies in the Multinational Forces. However, these calculations backfired on all levels - military, political and social.

The Reagan Administration, which played with fire when planning the 1982 invasion together with 'Israel', has now been forced to face the music sounded by the Lebanese nationalists' guns and popular support. Also, 'Israel' is paying the price, with the regime it tried to install in tatters. The battle of Beirut, Part II, reinforced the truth that by force of arms and popular unity, the aggressors against the Arab masses will eventually be defeated.

The military battle

Preliminary battles began on February 2nd, in Beirut's southern districts, pitting the army mainly against the Amal movement. Two days later, Lebanon was engulfed in all-out civil war, with the army sending 50 shells a minute into the shanty towns, and the nationalist artillery targeting fascist positions north to Junieh, east to Zahle and southwards. On the 6th, after a 17-hour pitched battle, the Lebanese Army was ousted from West Beirut by a combination of hand-to-hand combat and artillery support from the mountains. Having combined their forces from the capital to the mountains, the nationalist forces went on the offensive. A week later, the army and Phalangist forces were driven from key positions in the moun-



Victorious Amal fighter on the spot once occupied by the Marines

tains south of Beirut. Khaldeh, the coastal crossroads linking Beirut's southern entry to the Shouf and Aley regions, was in nationalist hands. The fascist siege of Beirut was broken; the fighters of the mountains and West Beirut, specifically, the Progressive Socialist Party and the Amal movement, established a joint military command. On February 15, the Lebanese Army's 4th brigade (one of two crack units, US-trained and Phalangist-controlled) was surrounded in Damour; then the nationalists gained control of the town.

Rather than wiping out the nationalist corridor, the regime set Lebanon ablaze and enacted its own isolation, not only politically but in terms of territory. The "central government" is now holed up in pockets. The 1,500 man 8th brigade (the other crack unit) at Souq al Gharb is the last line of defense for the Baabda Presidential Palace and the Defense Ministry. It is only one step before Amin Gemayel's authority is banished to its backland in the Phalangist ghetto created in Ashrafiyeh (East Beirut) and Kaserwan.