

The resurgence of a tormented camp

The Zionists have their own special grudge against Ain al Hilweh. In June 1982, its defenders held out for two weeks against the vicious Zionist onslaught. Prior to the battle of Beirut, Ain al Hilweh provided the foremost example of the human steadfastness that turned the Zionists' hightech invasion into a nightmare for the invaders. The camp was almost totally destroyed in the war itself and then subjected to a harsh pacification program whose methods ranged from bulldozing the remaining houses, and deprivation of daily needs, to letting loose fascist death squads to harass and murder Palestinians in the whole Saida area. The backbone of the Zionists' policy was depriving the camp of its leadership and breadwinners, first through the carnage of the war and then by massive deten-

tions. In this vacuum, the Zionists established the so-called National Guard, arming a group of collaborators to spy on and control the camp population. Thus, the Zionists had hoped to avoid daily confrontation with the people.

This spring the failure of the pacification program was brought home to the occupiers. The return of 1,400 detainees, bringing with them the struggle experience of Ansar, raised the morale and strengthened the social structure in the camp. In the overall atmosphere of the nationalist victories and Lebanese National Resistance Front's escalating operations, people began to challenge the collaborators of the National Guard; anti-occupation demonstrations became more militant. What caused the Israelis to storm Ain al Hilweh at this particular time was most likely the mass demonstration against the creation of the Zionist state, which was held on May 14th, and the concurrent attack on a National Guard post.

Dynamited houses in Ain al Hilweh



The masses fight back

The people of Ain al Hilweh responded militantly to the raid. When the Israelis withdrew around dawn, camp residents poured into the streets protesting this atrocity and boldly declaring their support to the PLO. Barriers were built at the entrances to the camp, and the residents declared a three day general strike; schools and shops closed down.

This popular protest continued the next day, and the Israelis again stormed the camp, accompanied by their stooges of the South Lebanon Army. The invaders fired indiscriminately, injuring two camp residents and killing a third, a woman who, with two sons in Ansar, had gone out to see where her younger sons were. More people converged in the streets, forming a procession carrying her body to Saida for burial. At the entrance of the camp, National Guard thugs opened fire, injuring three persons and forcing the procession back into the camp.

At the same time, the Israeli troops reinforced their patrols in the whole area and stopped traffic, as Saida and nearby villages went on solidarity strikes. In Baddawi camp in the north of Lebanon, 1500 women began a sit-in protest, as did Palestinian women in Damascus, Syria.

Tension continued in Ain al Hilweh for two more days with the Israelis intermittently sniping at residents. Yet on May 19th, patriots daringly shot and wounded a National Guard traitor. The National Guard went amok, shooting in all directions. No casualties were reported however. The next day, relative calm was restored for the first time since the initial raid, and one could observe a small victory won by the people's defiance: The National Guard was no longer manning checkpoints at the camp entrances. Nor were Israeli patrols in sight. At the very least, the Israelis must now rethink their tactics for silencing the people of Ain al Hilweh. So far, neither collaborators nor outright brutality has succeeded.