

Palestinians in Beirut Today

Almost two years after the departure of the PLO's forces, a comrade of the staff of «Al-Hadaf», the PFLP's Arabic weekly, took the opportunity to visit Beirut. A main focus of his reporting was the situation in the Palestinian refugee camps. He interviewed a variety of people in Sabra and Shatila. He also spoke with members of popular committees, the bodies that administered the camps when the PLO was still present, and which are now being reestablished under new, more complicated conditions. In addition he interviewed some Lebanese national leaders who addressed the question of the future of the Palestinian-Lebanese relations.

It is now two years since the Sabra-Shatila massacre, the crime that unequivocally proved the genocidal aims of the entire 1982 Zionist invasion of Lebanon. Interviewed in Radio Israel, an IDF major has said of the war: «We were not concerned with capturing Palestinians as much as we were with eliminating and destroying them. There were frank orders for this, or why else all the destruction in the cities, villages and camps where the Palestinians reside?» This genocidal thinking dictated the partial destruction of three Lebanese cities: Sour, Saida and Beirut. It meant destruction of 35% of the dwellings in Burj al Shemali, 50% in Al Bas and 70% in Rashadiya, all camps near Sour in South Lebanon. Ain al Hilweh camp near Saida was totally destroyed while the camps in the Beirut area were rendered uninhabitable by bombing. Over 100,000 Palestinians were uprooted.

The Zionists' genocidal aims also meant that clear orders were given to the fascist militias to enter Sabra and Shatila after the fighters had left, and «mop up the terrorists». The Israelis' claim of «2000 remaining terrorists», which was echoed by Reagan and his associates, was exposed not only by all information and logic but by the martyrs found in Sabra and Shatila on September 18, 1982: old men, women clutching their children, babies...

The people of Sabra and Shatila were just as «terrorist» as the Salvadorean trade union activists murdered by death squads, or the Guatemalan peasants massacred by the dictator's army. To the Zionists, as to Reagan's America, the Latin

American dictatorships or the South African racists, «terrorists» are those who seek to recover their human and national rights. US imperialism's responsibility for the Sabra-Shatila massacre lies not merely in the early withdrawal of its multinational forces contingent, leaving the way clear for the Israeli invasion of West Beirut. More basically, it lies in the ultramilitaristic climate and strategy launched by the Reagan Administration on a global scale. It is this which unites and encourages fascist tendencies and state terrorism against the people of the three continents.

Two years after the Sabra-Shatila massacre, we find that the most meaningful tribute we can pay to the martyrs is to open our pages to the voices of those remaining in these heroic camps. The following interviews give a sampling of the problems faced by the camp population. Though the nationalist victory in West Beirut this past winter greatly improved the security situation of Palestinians, serious social problems remain. The interviews below define a very clear task for the PLO which must be taken especially seriously by the revolutionary democratic forces. The right-wing leadership of the PLO has not given serious consideration to the problems of the Palestinians remaining in Beirut, and the intestine fighting of the last year has only served to further distract the revolution from its obligations to the masses. Thus, as efforts to reunite the PLO on a nationalist basis advance, this must lead to serious attention being devoted to this matter.

People of Sabra and Shatila Speak Out

«The Palestinian has lost everything».

Khalil Atiyah is 19 years old; he is a construction worker and lives in Sabra refugee camp. He commented: «The social conditions in the camps are very bad, and this has affected the way of thinking and social ties even within each family». Concerning the state of education in the camps, Khalil said, «It has been set back ten years. Schools are scarce and one usually has to pay for his education. This is in addition to helping his family, since most students are sons of martyrs and have family obligations.» As for his work, Khalil noted that its continuing depended on the security situation in the camps. At any rate, jobs are scarce and not dependable. He added that after the

departure of the Palestinian resistance from Beirut, the Lebanese authorities ordered the army to impose a tight encirclement of camps. This restricted the movement of Palestinians; if anyone moved from one place to another, he was subjected to all types of insults and humiliation, such as being asked: «What are you doing in this country?» The Palestinian felt that he had lost everything. There were restrictions on his movement, work, freedom, even his life, until the February uprising (which freed West Beirut of the reactionary army's control). The uprising ended many of the problems in the camps related to employment and education. Khalil also pointed out the importance of granting the Palestinians com-