



Israeli tanks attacked Zrariyah-34 villagers were killed.

damage is done, the Lebanese Forces will join Amin Gemayel's tactic of trying to get Syria to rein in the nationalists.

Population Transfer

The logic of Geagea's crusade was an Israeli plan, hatched after initial failure to incite sectarian strife in the Saida area. Geagea's fascists were inserted to do the job, making local Christians hostage to a hoped-for «Muslim backlash». The Israelis and the Lebanese Forces calculated the stream of Christian refugees southwards. This is part of a population transfer, to empty the «security zone» of militant Shiites and other nationalists, and install pro-Israeli or at least anti-Muslim, subdued residents.

Aside from this overall logic, there were many concrete proofs of Israeli involvement. The nationalist forces published information that an Israeli arms shipment had reached the Lebanese Forces in Beirut port just days before Geagea announced his «revolt». Israeli planes carried out surveillance of Syrian troops in North Lebanon as Geagea took over adjacent areas. On March 22nd, Sharon visited the fascist stronghold at Jezzine while the Israeli army crossed their occupation line and took positions in three villages east of Saida. According to Lebanese security forces, these events caused 150 Christians to flee their homes near Saida, realizing the seriousness of the coming conflict.

The Maronite bishop of Saida condemned the Lebanese Forces, giving further indication that many Christians were unwilling hostages in the Israeli plan. On April 10th, Israeli gunboats shelled Ain al Hilweh and villages east of Saida as the fascist bombardment continued. The Zionists' proxy, Lahd's South Lebanese Army, also joined in the shelling and some of Geagea's forces were stationed in Jezzine under Lahd's command.

Media Warfare

Knowing that they could not sustain their positions without close Israeli backup, the Lebanese Forces declared a cease-fire the last week of April, as the Israeli army withdrew from the central and western areas of the South. Geagea retreated eastwards to join Lahd in Jezzine, taking the fighters he had brought from outside the Saida area. The nationalist forces, under siege for a month, then moved to disarm the remaining Lebanese Forces and establish nationalist control. This, the logical aftermath of any battle, was viciously labeled in much of the bourgeois media as «Muslims plundering Christian villages».

In the following days, the nationalist forces eliminated the last positions of the Lebanese Forces on the coast north of Saida (Iklim Karroub). Others moved into the areas vacated by the Israeli occupiers, clashing with Lahd's army. The bourgeois media focused on the plight of Christian refugees in Jezzine, quoting exaggerated figures of their numbers from Israeli and fascist sources, and portraying them as faced by a «Muslim onslaught». In a joint statement, Walid Jumblatt and Nabih Berri pledged that Jezzine would not be attacked, but demanded that Lahd's army leave. The nationalists declared a cease-fire in order to «thwart the Israeli plans to drive our Christian people to the border», in the words of Osama Saad, leader of the Nasserite Organization of Saida. This was however rejected: Geagea declared that the Lebanese Forces would «redeem by blood» all that they had lost. In view of the ridiculous nature of Geagea's claim after a smashing defeat, Hobeika's replacing him can also be viewed as a face-saving maneuver, and an attempt to win over the refugees in Jezzine. Many of them had derided Geagea for leaving the Saida

area on a moment's notice, expressing feelings that they had been sold out.

Nationalist leaders have welcomed the return of refugees to their homes. In fact, a pilot project began in a village just north of Saida in early May: 200 Christian families returned to their homes with guarantees of safety and help from the nationalist forces. Yet the refugee problem in Lebanon is not restricted to Christians as the Israeli and fascist media pretend. It involves thousands of all faiths, dating back a decade when the Phalangists began «cleansing» the areas under their control of Muslims, Palestinians, the poor and non-fascist Christians.

In the same way, the conflict in South Lebanon between nationalists and pro-Israeli fascists is connected to the overall Lebanese crisis. The battles in the South were paralleled by escalated fighting in the Beirut and mountain areas in late April. As we go to press, it seems a new chapter is opening in the Lebanese civil war, further complicated by persisting Israeli intervention. The coming stage will demand even clearer political vision and tighter unity among the national and progressive forces if the Israeli-fascist plan for reentrenching sectarianism and oppression is to be foiled.

*Samir Geagea, Israeli-trained commander of the Lebanese Forces in the North, unsuccessfully led the fascists in the 1983 Shouf Mountain war, only to be escorted out by the Israelis. His revolt is related to long-standing differences in the Phalangist ranks over which tactics can best insure their dominance: Total alignment with 'Israel' or a modus vivendi with the nationalist forces and Syria. In early 1984, Geagea was promoted to greater authority in the Lebanese Forces as part of a reorganization that gave the militia a stronger political profile, nominally independent from the Phalangist Party. This division of labour allowed Amin Gemayel and the Phalangist Party to pursue the latter tactic, while the Lebanese Forces kept alive the militantly fascist, anti-Arab line. This set the conditions for Geagea's «revolt».