

# Repression for 'Peace'

In our last issue, we printed the statement of the Committee for the Defense of Democratic Freedoms in Jordan, about the arrest campaign which had pushed the number of political prisoners in King Hussein's jails to 300 by the end of November. Those arrested are still detained and arrests have continued. From mid-November 1985 to mid-January 1986, over 60 progressive nationalists were detained.

Repression is nothing new in Jordan where a virtual state of martial law reigns. All political parties are banned; union organizing is severely restricted; and an archaic military law allows for arrest and detention without stated charges. What distinguishes this particular campaign of repression is that most of those targeted are leaders either of trade or professional unions, or of Jordanian nationalist or Palestinian resistance organizations. It is the first time the Jordanian intelligence service has arrested so many leading figures at one time. As an example, the entire leadership of the Jordanian Writers Association in Irbid (northern Jordan) was rounded up in November (see box).

## Attacking trade unionists

There are several reasons why the Jordanian intelligence service struck at this particular time. One is related to the internal scene. In the months preceding the arrest campaign, trade union activities had increased markedly. Many unions had elections which were won by progressive nationalist candidates. In the absence of political parties, unions are one of the few vehicles for popular expression. Obviously, King Hussein does not look kindly upon the development of an independent, progressive trade union movement, for this would expose that his domestic and regional policies do not represent the people's opinions.

## Hussein walks the tightrope

The second reason for the repressive campaign is the regime's wish to have the internal situation in order, while the king tries to walk the political tightrope towards negotiations with 'Israel'.

On the one hand, the regime is toying with the idea of holding parliamentary elections some time this year. The



new parliament would represent both the East Bank (Jordan) and the West Bank (Palestinian land). The intention is to create a 'legitimate' facade to promote the monarchy's claim to the West Bank. The regime must calculate that this parliament might preside over the signing of 'peace' with the Zionist state. Thus, a prerequisite for holding such elections is silencing the progressive nationalist forces, to prevent them from taking any seats or using the election campaign to voice opposition to the regime's policy.

On the other hand, the regime is hard pressed by the intransigent Israeli

conditions for negotiations, and deeply disappointed by the US administration's failure to pressure 'Israel' to be more accomodating. Jordan received an added slap in the face when the US congress postponed a \$ 1.9 billion arms deal until at least March, unless Hussein starts direct negotiations with 'Israel'. On top of this is the regime's impatience with Arafat for failing to put all his cards on the table to US-Israeli satisfaction.

Caught in this dilemma, the regime can tolerate no internal dissent. It thus cracked down on the Jordanian national movement and cadres and leaders of the Palestinian resistance organizations, who reside in Jordan. Specially targeted by the arrests was DFLP and also the PFLP and Palestinian Communist Party. Clearly the regime sought to cut down the progressive forces whose rejection of the Amman accord is shared by broad sectors of the masses.

While the revolutionary Palestinian forces are facing severe repression, even the Arafat leadership is relatively restricted, for the regime's peace plans envision the Palestinian role as symbolic rather than material. Arafat's men are prevented from visiting the refugee camps and opening new facilities. This only serves to emphasize that Arafat's relations with Jordan do not in any way serve the Palestinian people or cause. The king wants Arafat as a figurehead, and is prepared to dump him if this becomes politically opportune. As a close adviser to the king said, «Before, we thought the peace process wouldn't work without Arafat. Now we know it won't work with him.» (Los Angeles Times, December 7, 1985)

## Repression to Stop Student Elections

Choking democratic freedom, the Jordanian regime took new steps to prevent the students at the Jordan and Yarmouk universities from exercising their right to elect student societies\*. November 1985 was set as the date for elections at the two universities. After the deadline for students' filing their candidacy, the intelligence service took the lists of nominees and called in more than fifty of those nominated at the Jordan University on the eve of elections. The intelligence officers demanded that the student candidates choose between withdrawing from the elections or being arrested. Most of the candidates did not respond to these threats. Then the security forces deployed throughout the uni-

versity in a show of force, aiming to terrorize the students into refraining from voting. This led the candidates to withdraw from the elections, protesting interference and demanding the cancellation of the repressive measures. However, the security forces and the intelligence persisted. They stormed homes and arrested a number of student leaders. Prior to the elections, four student leaders had been arrested from the Jordan University and four from Yarmouk University.

\* In 1975, the student union was closed down at the Jordan University after a two-week strike organized because 300 students were forced by the administration to drop courses in mid-semester. 1500 students took part in the strike which was resolved in their favor. Then the administration dissolved the union and replaced it with student societies, hoping to disperse student efforts.