

incomes are suffering most. According to official statistics, 17.5% of families in Jordan have a monthly income of 50 dinars, which is considered under the poverty line. On the other hand, 20% of families have access to 48% of the GNP, while the remaining 80% must live on the remaining 52%.

In this light, the economic policy of the regime amounts to little more than organized plunder of the country's resources, impoverishing broad strata of the population. It is no wonder that the people turned their wrath on the government, expressing themselves in slogans such as those shouted in Kerak: «Cancel all the latest economic measures,» «Bring to trial those who were responsible for the deterioration of the economic conditions» and «Form a national government that will work for free and honest parliamentary elections.»

## THE SOCIAL BASE OF THE REVOLT

Erupting as a spontaneous economic protest, the April revolt distinguishes itself from previous mass movements in Jordan, which were based on national, political issues. It occurred in areas where the national and progressive movement has not traditionally been strong. This was, however, no accident, because the South is generally the poorer half of the country and the population there is thus hardest hit by the economic crisis and related austerity measures. Thus, for the first time, the masses of the South, the masses of the countryside, all the popular sectors and almost all of them Jordanian have participated in a popular revolt. Few Palestinians live in these areas and the regime was consequently deprived of its favored weapon of scapegoating them.

The breadth of the revolt meant that it could not be dismissed, and the character of its social base meant that it touched the regime's Achilles heel. The South is still dominated by tribal relations and this has allowed the regime to count the population there among its staunchest supporters. It was thus potentially devastating when the leaders of Bani Shar, one of the largest tribal federations in the country, publicly denounced «a class of opportunists (in Amman) that have no interests except

in the accumulation of unlawful money and wealth at the expense of the people» (as quoted in *The Guardian*, April 25th).

It has been from among Jordanians living under tribal conditions that the regime has recruited its most loyal troops for repressing the people, as was apparent in the war on the Palestinian resistance from September 1970 until July 1971. However, this year's revolt signalled a narrowing of the regime's social base, as soldiers took their place in the ranks of the people protesting government policy; several soldiers were among those martyred, including a senior air force officer - an unprecedented occurrence. The revolt was preceded by a near mutiny in the army's 12th battalion, led by Masoud Al Adwan, protesting inflation; this led King Hussein to visit the battalion several times before departing for the US. The military has recently called for salary raises but the government refused, showing how the economic crisis has limited the regime's maneuverability in terms of satisfying even sectors considered of vital importance. Such friction is almost unknown in the Jordanian army since 1970 when the regime purged those with nationalist inclinations or hesitations about confronting the Palestinians.

These characteristics of the revolt, added to its timing which coincides with the Palestinian intifada in the neighboring occupied territories, mean that it could mark a turning point for the struggle in Jordan. It gives the opportunity to link the daily social and economic issues of vital importance to the masses with overall national political issues - the struggle for democracy and for Jordan to have a nationalist policy in harmony with the interests of the masses and with the Palestinian cause. This is the meaning of spreading the Palestinian intifada throughout the Arab world, to make it a mass struggle for freedom and social justice.

## POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Narrowing the social base of the regime, and questioning its stability, means narrowing its room for maneuver and thus its potential usefulness to imperialism as a buffer

zone protecting Israel and subsuming the Palestinian problem. It is this function of the regime which has enabled it to garner aid from the US in particular and from other reactionary regimes, like Saudi Arabia. Thus, the regime is in a bind, for it needs such support more than ever in the light of the revolt. This explains the authorities' quick response, both the immediate violent repression and the king's rushing home to set things in order, leading to the hasty resignation of Zeid Al Rifai's government on April 24th and promises of speedy elections. There have been no elections in Jordan since 1967, and the regime had only recently contemplated holding new ones. This idea did not stem from any sudden democratic impulse on the part of the regime. Rather, the intention was to constitute an all Jordanian parliament after having severed ties to the Palestinian West Bank, the residents of which had been nominally represented in the old parliament. Also now, in the absence of overall democratic freedom, new elections in themselves would offer very little as the parliament does not have real power and political parties are banned.

The political implications of the mass revolt were summed up as follows by Abdel Rahim Malouh, PFLP Politbureau member who spent a number of years in Jordanian jails during the seventies, in an interview in Damascus:

«This broad mass movement will force the king to sit down and think, to discuss the situation and reevaluate previous policies. This process has begun with dissolving Rifai's government, and that in itself is a achievement for the masses, since it was one of their demands. This means that the regime acknowledges that their past policies were responsible for the situation. However, we are convinced that this will not solve the problem, because the roots of the crisis are the class nature of the regime and its subordination to imperialism. There is a big possibility that the regime will resort to repressive policies, but in any case, this unique event, which has not occurred in Jordan for years, will have a decisive influence in the coming stage... It is a qualitative, militant turning point and a prelude to future events. ●