

describing the genuineness of these changes; nor should we consider the long, bitter experience of the past as the only criterion for evaluating these developments. In this discussion, no one has a monopoly on the absolute truth. These developments are still new, and there must be an intensive and profound debate so that the various nationalist forces can crystallize a sound view for themselves and for the masses.

Limits of the democratic margin

An unprecedented margin of democracy has been achieved in Jordan. It has affected almost all aspects of life in a relatively deep way. It has threatened, in many cases, the absolute dominance of the executive authority in general and the intelligence service in particular. It is impossible to note all the particulars which have resulted from the revival of democratic life in Jordan. Here we will refer to the most important decisions and measures:

1. The various political and social forces and trends agree that the parliamentary elections were honest, despite the fallacy of the 1986 election law on which they were based. (Among other faults, this law is sectarian, stipulating representation by minority or religious groups; the number of deputies elected from each region is not proportional to the population of that region.)

2. Many representatives of the nationalist and democratic forces, as well as other opponents of the regime, won the people's confidence and were elected to parliament, despite the ban on political parties other than the Muslim Brotherhood.

3. The release of all political detainees, i.e., those who had not been brought to trial, the return of confiscated passports; and the government's recognition of the citizens' freedom of movement.

4. The extensive and bold discussion of the cabinet's statement when it was presented to the parliament by Prime Minister Mudar Badran. The government won the parliament's confidence

only after declaring the suspension of martial law, and promising to abolish it completely within four to six months, as well as to reconsider the 1935 defense law and the release of all political prisoners.

5. Overturning the decision of the martial courts to dissolve the elected administrative boards of three Jordanian newspapers (*Al Rai*, *Al Destour* and *Sawt Al Shaab*).

6. Abrogation of the martial court decision to dissolve the Jordanian Writers' League.

7. Stripping the martial courts of their authority to rule on the validity of many laws, such as the anti-communism law and the law on affiliation to banned parties; the cases related to such laws will be heard in civil courts. The anti-communism law was subsequently repealed.

8. Establishing an investigation committee to examine the reasons for the economic crisis and punish those responsible. (However, there has been no change in the economic policy.)

These are the main features of the new democratic life in Jordan, from the November 8th parliamentary elections till the discussion of the cabinet's statement in early January. These democratic measures indicate that Jordan is entering a period of democracy, especially as compared to the previous situation, or to the status quo in much of the third world and the Arab world in particular. A significant margin of democracy has been achieved. It will, however, remain narrow as long as the ban remains on political parties and freedom of the press; the martial and emergency laws are not totally repealed; all political prisoners are not released; and the required measures have not been taken to facilitate the return of thousands of exiled Jordanian citizens. One must also bear in mind that the democratization process thus far has relied on an election law that is both unfair and insufficient. The elections were held under the shadow of martial law and the total ban on political parties. This deprived the political forces, save for the Muslim Brotherhood, of their right to field their can-

didates openly. These deficiencies raise doubts not only about the motivation for the democratic measures, but also about their future, and the seriousness of the Jordanian authorities' expressed intention to continue this process.

Motives and background

A scrupulous examination of the political and economic conditions prevailing in or affecting Jordan in the last few years, reveals five main factors which led to the current situation:

First: The intifada in the occupied territories, which tangibly reasserted the Palestinian quest for independence, and, on the other hand, the growing Likud extremism. The King's decision to sever ties with the Palestinian West Bank signified a retreat for the so-called Jordanian option for resolving the Palestinian question. At the same time, this step revealed King Hussein's fears of the growing extremist tendency in the Likud, which claims that Jordan is the proper site for any future Palestinian state. The king tried to counteract this claim with a series of «Jordanization» measures after severing ties with the West Bank. The parliamentary elections were part of the monarch's efforts to block the Likud plan for resettling the Palestinians in Jordan.

Second: The Jordanian national movement also played a role. Though this movement was not able to really threaten the regime, its militants kept the issue of democracy alive and exposed the reactionary policy of the monarchy, internally and vis-a-vis the Arab-Zionist conflict.

Third: Jordan's economic crisis worsened, with foreign debts reaching about ten billion dollars. At the same time, there was a near cut-off of Arab financial aid to Jordan, due to the US-Arab reactionary opposition to the king's severing ties with the West Bank. Thus, Hussein was left alone to face the crisis. He therefore began to reorganize the internal front, hoping to draw the political opposition into the battle to resolve the crisis.

Fourth: The unprecedented mass