

protest of April 1989 revealed the weakness of popular support for the regime, even in its strongholds in southern Jordan. The decrease in the regime's popularity was due to the aggravated economic and social problems which occurred in the absence of a legislature. The dominance of the executive authority over the country's resources led to the policy of theft of public funds, corruption, favoritism and other practices which were not only illegal, but also immoral. The subsequent resignation of Zaid Al Rifai's government and the relatively free elections were part of the effort to restore public confidence in the authorities, mend the fences broken with the April protest, enlarge the regime's social base, and absorb the new social strata which have emerged as a result of the economic developments which began in the mid-seventies.

Fifth: The Arab countries, including Jordan, are not immune to the influence of the new international situation with perestroika and its repercussions. King Hussein is one of the most experienced Arab politicians, and adept in both Arab and international affairs. He is well aware of the potential impact of these dramatic international developments on a country like Jordan which lacks a self-sufficient economic base, as well as democracy and security. Hence, he was the first Arab ruler to board the train of change, taking the initiative to respond to the changes within limits that do not endanger his regime.

Indeed, no single one of the above-mentioned factors alone could have pushed the country towards the period of relative democracy for which the cornerstone is now being laid. Without their interaction, the previously prevailing state of oppression and political blackmail would have continued.

## The pressure of the discontent

Since the democratic margin emerged, the task of all nationalist forces has been to protect and develop it, so that it covers all the political, economic and social aspects of life.

They must shoulder this responsibility without any illusions about the genuineness of these changes, and disregarding the question mark that the previous era would put to the current developments. The main task now is to develop this experiment, and not leave it as an easy prey for those local and regional forces that are working to abort it. There are many such forces, beginning with some trends within the state itself, namely the executive authority whose interests are threatened by democracy; this includes the intelligence and high-ranking army officers. These two groups are the most discontent with the introduction of democracy into the political life. They have nothing in common with democracy because they were brought up in a fully tyrannical atmosphere. The more democracy there is, the more limited their authority.

Ironically, we have a former security officer, who is now a member of parliament, accusing Mudar Badran (himself a former head of the intelligence) of «diluting the role of the intelligence and compromising the dignity of its officers» (*Middle East International*, no. 366, January 5th). This clearly indicates the political opposition in some circles of the security apparatus to Badran's measures which reduced the influence of the intelligence on organized political activities. Moreover, we have the Muslim Brotherhood trying to break down the foundations of the very margin of democracy that brought them into the parliament, by raising reactionary slogans which are at odds with democracy and progress. For example, as a solution to unemployment, the Brotherhood proposed depriving women of the right to work.

Regionally, there are Arab regimes that fear that the «democratic fever» will infect their people. More important is the pressure applied on Jordan by Israel with a view towards stopping the democratization. Prime Minister Shamir and Trade Minister Sharon renewed their threats that Jordan is the site of any future Palestinian state. The Zionists have, moreover, tried to

exploit a number of shooting incidents at the Palestinian-Jordanian borders. In one case, they shot down a Jordanian air force helicopter, killing five high-ranking officers, after guerrillas opened fire on an Israeli patrol from Jordanian territory, despite the Jordanian authorities denial of responsibility for the incident. Obviously, the Israeli provocations stem from fear of a reactivation of the Jordanian national movement and the Palestinian nationalist forces in Jordan, and especially so in this era of the intifada.

## What about the future?

The objective factors which led to the democratization process are all deep-rooted developments that can be expected to continue to exert an influence for some time to come. Thus, it is logical to assume that the mainstream in the regime and King Hussein himself will remain obliged to continue the new course, as long as it does not endanger the regime's stability or its basic political and economic plans. At present, there is no indication that the new margin of democracy will be suddenly reversed, as happened with the coup which toppled Nabulsi's government in 1956.

However, continuation of the democratization process is also bound to the capacity of the pro-democracy forces to confront the pressure exerted by those who aim to abort this experience. This presents big tasks for the Jordanian national movement, especially in terms of politicizing and mobilizing the masses to protect and expand their democratic rights. The population at large still harbors suspicions as to how genuine the new democracy is. At the same time, they have yet to experience any benefits on the economic level, as the crisis continues unabated. The experienced political forces have the duty to provide the framework for involving the masses in shaping the democratization process. Today, there is a real opportunity for wide-ranging national democratic activity in Jordan, to enhance democracy and contribute to charting the future policy of the country. ●