

all fields, but the constitution was frozen all these years. The state institutions were not developed but used only as a tool in the hands of the bourgeoisie. For 30 years, we lived under martial law which the authorities used to suppress the political movement, especially the nationalists and the left. Then, in 1989, the April revolt in the South of Jordan erupted as a reaction to the decay of the economy. The bourgeoisie realized it could no longer rule as it had. Searching for an outlet to maintain its dominant role in the society, the bourgeoisie sought a new national charter. Realizing that the nationalist and popular movement was heading towards a larger social explosion, the ruling class took democracy as an instrument to ensure its own survival.»

Tayseer Al Zabri of the JPDP termed the charter «a denominator for many parties, ideas and political groups,» emphasizing the distinction between basic principles and specific articles of the charter. He added, «At the same time, we have our program in Jordan as one of the democratic parties.»

Abdel Rahman Al Majali of the JCP concurred with the evaluation of the others when he said: «Generally speaking, we view the charter as an important step in the right direction, especially since it confirmed democracy, political pluralism and civil liberties which are the main features of the era...» There is general consensus that the charter set out positive principles in the economic, social and cultural fields as well. The charter also defined the relations between Jordan and Palestine, affirming Jordan's recognition of the State of Palestine and its disengagement from the West Bank. According to Dabbagh, «The principle aspect is the right of the Palestinians to express their convictions and defend their identity. The charter affirms the historical, fraternal relations between Jordanians and Palestinians, considering Palestine as a pan – Arab cause and the struggle to liberate it as a duty for all people in Jordan.» Dabbagh also noted that the charter defines the army's role as non – political: «Its main function is to protect Jordan from Israel and to join the Arabs in liberating Palestine. The internal security forces should execute the law and not interfere in political life or violate the citizens' human dignity.»

Both he and Tayseer Al Zabri differentiated between the general principles of the charter and the need to formulate new laws, especially for elections, licensing political parties and publishing. Al Zabri reiterated the need «to make democracy a material reality, not merely words hanging in the air,» while Dabbagh stressed the imperative of a new labor law to guarantee the right of unionization, job security and social insurance for all workers. Some of these rights were partially provided for in the old law, but space was left for employers to implement them selectively, to their own interests. According to Dabbagh, «It is important to affirm that the right to work is sacred, especially now with so much unemployment. From the labor law, we can characterize the type of society we have. We are not so naive as to think we will get a great work law; this is still a bourgeois state, so there will be compromise. But the new draft is very good compared to the old law; it will give workers their rights, relatively speaking.»

Dabbagh predicted that the democratic forces stand on the threshold of a great political battle to have new laws adopted, abolish martial law and move quickly to normalize political life. «We think that martial law will be abolished, especially with the new government.»

Abolishing martial law

On June 3rd, six members of the Jordanian Communist Party – Revolutionary Path had been arrested when leaflets, purportedly slandering Prime Minister Badran, were found in their homes, although there was no evidence to support the

security forces' claims that they had either written or distributed the leaflets. The democratic forces protested these arrests as a clear violation of freedom of expression, highlighting the imperative of cancelling martial law once and for all. In fact, there are continuing attempts to sabotage democracy from forces within the executive and security apparatus, who wish to reassert their steadily eroding power. However, such violations appear more as a backlash, «splashes» which the democratic forces can combat on a case – to – case basis, rather than a concerted effort by the regime to kill democracy.

In the negotiations for entering the new government, JANDA obtained a pledge for the release of all political prisoners (30 had remained in Jordanian jails even after the democratic opening) and for the repeal of martial law. The latter proved more complicated than might appear since many fields were covered by this law. Those wanting to abolish it were confronted by the fact that another way would have to be found for dealing with the Petra Bank scandal (a major Jordanian bank that went bankrupt due to fraud), since the civil law code does not cover economic crimes. (Postscript: On July 7th, King Hussein cancelled most martial law provisions, effective July 8th.)

In fact, the new government was being formed in the same days that these interviews were conducted. It was generally understood that this would happen after the charter's adoption. In explaining the process whereby the charter evolved, Tayseer Al Zabri related some facts that indicate that a new government was imperative if democratization was to go forward. He noted that the past government had delayed work on the charter, saying : «The former prime minister was against some of the articles we put in the section on pluralism; he was fearful of some of the amendments to the constitution which we proposed, especially concerning articles 114 and 120.» (Article 114 gives the cabinet the right to monitor the allocation and expenditure of public funds, contingent on the king's approval, and to organize the government's storehouses; article 120 gives the cabinet, contingent on the king's approval, the prerogative of issuing regulations governing the kingdom's administration – the formation of government departments, appointing and dismissing government employees, supervising their work, determining their areas of competence, etc. The charter assigned these powers to the parliament which should pass new laws regulating the use of funds and organizing the country's administration.)

Al Zabri continued: «We also said that if martial law was needed in the future, it must be approved by the parliament and for a limited period. These things made him angry and he put the charter aside. It was not the Gulf crisis that delayed the charter. At that time, we were doing well. We asked the chairman of the charter committee, Mr. Ahmed Obeidat, to stop the discussion of the charter due to the situation, but he refused. Then when we finished our work at the end of 1990, Badran put it aside because he was angry about these points.»

New government

In mid – June, Prime Minister Badran resigned and King Hussein appointed Taher Masri to form a new government. On June 19th, the new, 25 – member cabinet was sworn in. Its composition is noteworthy in several respects. Most obvious is the absence of the Muslim Brotherhood which held five ministries in Badran's government; in the new cabinet, three ministries were assigned to more moderate representatives of the Islamic trend. On the other hand, five representatives of the progressive nationalist coalition, JANDA, were brought into the cabinet for the first time, heading the ministries of state,