



Amman demonstration for cancellation of death sentences in Kuwait

labor, health, youth, and trade, industry and supply. Among the independents in the new cabinet, there are several other progressive nationalists, while the rest of the ministers are liberal in tendency, among them some notably pro-US personages. The changed composition of the cabinet was described as «tantamount to a coup d'état in Jordanian contemporary politics» by some observers, while others noted: «The political elements in the Masri government are pro-establishment liberals with a heavy twist of pan-Arab and leftist trends, in comparison to the last Badran government which was pro-establishment with a noted presence of conservatives and Muslim fundamentalists» (*Jordan Times*, June 20–21st).

There are several reasons why Jordan's political establishment opted for this type of government at this stage. Taher Masri is the first Palestinian ever to serve as Jordan's prime minister and he has close relations with the PLO leadership. Many took his appointment as a sign that the regime is preparing the groundwork for a joint Jordanian–Palestinian delegation in order to enter negotiations with Israel.

Related to the internal scene, the new government's composition is a clear sign that the regime has reinforced its conviction that continuing the democratization process is key in developing the country. In his letter of designation to Masri, King Hussein listed national unity as the first of a number of principles on which Jordan's strength and progress must be based. This letter normally sets out priorities for the government; in it the king termed democracy «one of the most important pillars of national security» – a clear departure from the state's former reliance on the intelligence services to preserve the status quo.

The stress on modern development, democracy and unity explains why the Muslim Brotherhood was excluded from government in this round. While failing to launch any forward-thinking policies in the ministries they controlled, such as agriculture, the Brotherhood also fomented social division.

On June 12th, just before Badran's government resigned, 5,000 parents and educators presented him with a petition protesting the policies of Education Minister Akaileh of the Brotherhood, who had decreed that fathers could not attend certain of their daughters' activities at school, nor mothers visit their sons' schools. Other acts which the petitioners were protesting included: the dismissal of 14 ministry officials,

attempts to ban certain books and coeducation, limiting the freedom of schools to close on Christian holidays and sabotage of Jordan's educational reform plan. The parents and educators raised the banner of the right to choose, which is more in line with the establishment's new bent towards development and social peace, via democracy, than are the Brotherhood's restrictive and reactionary ideas.

In his letter of designation to Masri, King Hussein also introduced two concepts which should give the progressive forces an official point of departure in connecting democratization to social justice. Among the government's top priorities he listed «correcting the internal and external imbalances in our economy» and «achieving a fair distribution of national income between all segments of society ...» Moreover, the king's stress on the Palestinian cause not only as a foreign policy issue, but among the principles for developing the society in Jordan, continued the trend of the National Charter to equalize between all citizens of the country, be they of Palestinian or Jordanian origin. This reflects the fact that the establishment in Jordan has finally come to terms, politically speaking, with the fact that the Palestinian community in Jordan represents a dynamic social and economic force which is needed for the country's future development. Thus, the PLO and all Palestinian revolutionaries are presented with the challenge of simultaneously participating in the democratization process and defending the Palestinian cause as that of a people with special interests due to their dispossession from their homeland.

On another level, the inclusion of JANDA in the new cabinet can also be viewed as a political challenge, or even a trap. In the current situation, the Jordanian regime needs the left and nationalist forces as a legitimizer of its policies and to evolve genuine national unity. Moreover, the chief concern in Jordan is the economic crisis, which virtually all admit to be irresolvable even if the government truly seeks a solution. On the one hand, the progressive forces have gained an unprecedented platform for addressing the people and influencing policy. On the other, if they fail to mount any constructive initiatives from their new posts, their mass following will suffer and they can easily be put aside in the future if the establishment finds their presence in government inconvenient. These apparently domestic issues also intersect with Jordan's relations to the rest of the world, where many of Jordan's old allies among Arab reaction and capitalist countries are surely not overjoyed by the new cabinet. However, the present situation, where Jordan is being treated with arrogant hostility by the US, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, mitigates for continued democratization, independent decision-making, social cohesion and close Palestinian–Jordanian relations.

Making democracy a material reality

On this background, it is interesting to note the progressive parties' answers about how they plan to work in the wake of the adoption of the National Charter.

Abdel Rahman Al Majali explained that the JCP embarked on a review of some of its ideological and organizational positions some time ago. «This process is closely connected with international developments and especially the changes that swept the socialist camp and the Soviet Union. Our review is also based on the democratic, political changes in Jordan and our preparations to transform the party from underground to public existence. These realities have nothing to do with the charter as such, which is a general framework for life in Jordan with its various trends; it does not intervene in political groups» ►