

thousands of people. In agriculture, they initiated nothing except letting the sheep go to the forests to graze!»

The Muslim Brotherhood was not negatively affected by the results of the Gulf crisis in Al Zabri's view, but he added another element to his evaluation: «This question is not restricted to Jordan. People here see what the Islamic forces are doing all over the Arab world. What did they do recently in Tunis? In Algeria? When the country was heading towards democracy and elections, they took to the streets, creating a crisis and confronting the government, seeking to oust it. Many people here are fearful of what might happen if they were to depend on the Muslim Brotherhood. Perhaps also the clashes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip [between Hamas and PLO groups] have had an effect; people see that these things are not to the benefit of the intifada... However, the Brotherhood is still a strong party here, having spread their forces in many areas. We need time, work and programs so people can compare us with them. Now, with ministers in the new government, we are in the spotlight. The people are watching us and comparing our performance with the past.»

The conflict between the Muslim Brotherhood and the progressive forces appears most intense on the social level, particularly concerning education and women's role in society, but Lua'y Dabbagh explained that it exists as a political conflict as well: «We don't think all the Islamic forces believe in democracy. Some Islamic officials have said that all non – believers and leftists should be out of the society. Though we join forces politically, especially for Palestine and supporting Iraq, this does not mean we are in overall harmony in the political field. I expect a confrontation to occur in the coming session of the parliament when we discuss the new laws; then the divergence of ideology will become apparent...» Dabbagh explained that it can at times be difficult to distinguish whether disagreement with the Islamic forces is social or political, because they themselves do not make this distinction: «They go on the offensive on the social level to arrive at political results. The social tension they have generated concerning the status of women and Christians in the society could have dangerous political consequences. This society has its defects, so such tension could be disastrous, in the worst case leading towards sectarian conflict.»

In discussing the Islamic forces, Dabbagh found it important to distinguish between the religion itself and those who believe in it and may instinctively be anti – imperialist and anti – colonialist on the one hand, and the «political religion» on the other. The political religion, as seen with the Muslim Brotherhood, has traditionally had the role of compromise – in Egypt, Jordan, etc.: «They found a way to coexist with the government even if the latter was pro – imperialist. In Jordan, they did not constitute an opposition or even have a policy against corruption. Their political role was limited until the 1989 elections, when they rushed on the scene. For the first time in their history, the Brotherhood confronted the government in Jordan, hoping to get votes, and they did.»

Concerning the strength of the Islamic forces, Dabbagh pointed to two factors. The first is that religious ideology is widespread among the masses, especially the less educated. Secondly, the Muslim Brotherhood depends on bourgeois strata, especially big and small merchants. «This sector is very conservative and in a society like Jordan, we don't expect its role to decrease. However, the war and its consequences and the new era in the world have weakened their ideology.» Politically, the Unity Party seeks ways to cooperate with the Islamic forces. «It is not in our interests to make an open struggle with them,» stated Dabbagh, adding, «but we have to confront them politically and in terms of their social policy,

because the conflict this generates will have negative consequences on democracy. Now, with the new government, if the popular movement, the liberals and the bourgeoisie arrive at any solution to the main social problems, this will be a shock for the Muslim Brotherhood. If no solutions are found, JANDA will take the blow as did the Brotherhood when the upper bourgeoisie excluded them from this government.»

## **Pluralism and party proliferation**

With the adoption of the National Charter, over 60 parties applied to be licensed. I asked Lua'y Dabbagh if there was political justification for such proliferation or if many of these parties were based on personalities rather than clearly defined programs. He discounted the role of individuals and rather listed five reasons for this blossoming of pluralism: «One: This is our first democratic experience in Jordan; the emergence of so many parties is not strange, but a natural expression for a highly politicized and educated society that has lived under oppression. Two: Over the years, all pan – Arab and leftist parties have operated in Jordan, especially the Palestinian movement; the constellation is quite varied, so it is natural to see many parties now that they are allowed. Third: It is obvious that when we have always had a one – party system, the party of the government and intelligence services, defending the interests of a single class, the reaction will be a proliferation of parties; even the bourgeoisie is a diversified class; so now parties are blooming, representing all classes and strata. Four: The history of many of these parties is connected with the Arab national movement and its branches in different countries. In Jordan, this has expressed itself in diversity. Let's take the Baath Party as an example. There are two sections, pro – Iraq and pro – Syria, but even within these branches you find anti – regime groups that do not join the other branch; thus, there are 6 – 7 projected Baath Parties now in Jordan.

«Five and in conclusion: We strongly believe in the basic right of persons in Jordan to create parties as permitted by the constitution. We must protect this right and not be afraid of the proliferation of parties now, but we are not so superficial as to think that in a society of 4 million, more than 60 parties can survive. The political and social struggle will provide a natural selector. The 60 parties will eventually be reduced to the few which have the required dynamics and modes of struggle, and a program which corresponds to the major issues of concern to the main classes and strata.»

All three of the parties interviewed expressed satisfaction with the state of cooperation within JANDA, which also includes other leftist and nationalist groups, and individuals connected to Fatah. The need for improving joint work stems both from JANDA's new posts in the cabinet and the future objective of forming a progressive national front in Jordan. The Unity Party stresses that this front must rest on the unity of the left, which will become increasingly pressing as the situation evolves. Lua'y Dabbagh noted that such unity is not only an objective necessity but also quite possible if dialogue is intensified among the leftist parties: «The diversities among the left parties are subjective. In our analysis and ways of facing problems, we are very close. In some cases, the diversities between parties are the same as diversities in each party internally... Left unity is a task in our program.»

## **Jordan and Palestine**

In June, King Hussein made headlines when he told the French magazine *Le Point* that now is the time for face-to-face talks with Israel. When asked about the significance of this statement, Tayseer Al Zabri pointed out that the royal court had denied this statement, saying the