

With its kingdom created by the British colonialists as a buffer for the Zionist state, the Hashemite monarchy has stayed in power by suppressing the people who fell under its jurisdiction, whether Palestinian or Jordanian. Hard repression has always been applied against any nationalist tendency and especially leftists. In the fifties, the regime gained notoriety for its fascist practices, imprisoning and torturing those who spoke out or tried to struggle against the Zionist occupation of Palestine. This later culminated in the 1970-71 massacres to drive out the Palestinian resistance and terrorize the people into passivity.

Then for a time, more subtle means of repression reigned. Imprisonment was still used of course, but the regime also began to deal with political activists by denying them permission to work and travel, withholding their passports and calling them for interrogation intermittently.

With the Zionist invasion of Lebanon, King Hussein eyed a new chance for entering the imperialist settlement. Anxious to find a Palestinian cover for this, and hoping to capitalize on the PLO's evacuation from Beirut, he offered an amnesty for those who wished to return to their families living in Jordan. In reality, this marked a resurgence in open, brutal repression. The King's amnesty proved to be a lie,

as cadres of the Palestinian resistance were rounded up on their return. This included those who had left from Jordan with official permission to fight in the 1982 war, at a time when the king found it opportune to display his «patriotism». Also arrested were those who entered Jordan after being released from Ansar, while Palestinians returning from imprisonment in Zionist jails continued to be rearrested. New restrictions were imposed on Palestinians living in Jordan, that young men must sign up for the army, as well as on students coming from the occupied territories.

Meanwhile the regime did not drop its more subtle repressive means. These are now applied against the families of the growing number of political detainees: refusal of work and residence permits, withholding passports, threats of deportation, etc.

While the regime has billed its repressive campaign as a precautionary measure, to guarantee against unrest, it actually created a new field for popular and nationalist struggle. Mahatta, the central prison in Amman, became a crowded meeting place, bringing together long-term political detainees, cadres from the Palestinian resistance armed with the experience of Lebanon, as well as youth from the 1967 occupied territories. Their hunger strike in March marked a new escalation of the long-term struggle for democracy in Jordan.

many institutions including the Jordanian government, parliament, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Justice and the General Directory of Security and Intelligence. Copies were also sent to the Jordanian Trade Union, the PLO office in Amman and Amnesty International. The strike lasted for 13 consecutive days. During this time, the number of participants rose to 114 prisoners.

Reactions

The hunger strike created an internal outcry and drew the attention of broad sectors among different circles in the country. This is because it was the biggest strike in the Jordanian prisons since 1950's, serving to expose the falsity of the «democracy» claimed by the authorities. The authorities were dismayed by this bold act on the part of the political prisoners and by the public attention it drew. Day by day, mass support mounted in solidarity with the prisoners' demands. Support came from mass organizations and trade unions. Solidarity actions occurred, such as the women's sit-in at the Red Cross headquarters in Amman, and the women's demonstration to the PLO office in Amman, which was suppressed by the Jordanian security forces. Some of the women were detained and interrogated.

The heads of trade unions in Jordan sent a telegram to the Prime Minister, demanding acceptance of the political prisoners' demands. They also sought to meet with him for the same purpose. The General Secretariat of the Popular Forces in Jordan held a meeting and adopted the prisoners' demands. Furthermore, it made contact with some members of parliament in order to have the issue raised there. The Committees for the Defense of Democratic Freedom in Jordan appealed to all Arab and international organizations concerned with freedom and human rights. (See box for text.)

Hunger Strike in Al-Mahatta Prison

Political prisoners escalate their struggle and achieve one round

On March 10th, political prisoners in Mahatta Central Prison in Amman, declared a hunger strike to last until their demands were fulfilled. They called for the release of all political detainees. This included the release of prisoners from the occupied territories, so that they could return there before their Israeli-

issued permits expired, which would mean de facto expulsion. They also demanded a review of the cases of the prisoners who had been arbitrarily sentenced in unjust military trials. These demands were spelled out in a statement by the political prisoners in Mahatta, and copies were distributed to