

Jordan The Labor Force Dilemma

The recent international conference on population held in New Mexico hosted many celebrities, among them Queen Nour of Jordan.

The Queen expressed her great sorrow and deep concern, because of the poor living conditions that prevail in the «third world». She called on all conferees to provide their people with better living conditions. The Queen went on to ask with great pain: «Is it the fate of the workers to keep on moving forever, searching for employment and better living conditions? How long are they going to keep running after unfixed wages?»

The Queen obviously «forgot» to mention that her concerns were exactly what the Jordanian workers are facing. In fact, in the Arab world Jordan rates second after Egypt in terms of workers' emigration.

The following study examines «the fate» of the Jordanian workers, highlighting that the severe situation is caused by the deliberate policy of the Jordanian regime which Queen Nour represents!

The most recent official statistics indicate that the population of Jordan is 2,964,662.¹ According to the Unified Arab Economic Report of 1983, Jordan's total labor force numbered 1,476,000 in 1982. Among them the male and female workers, numbered 430,000 or 30% of the total labor force.² On the other hand, there were 74,588 public employees.³

Such a labor force demands that the government provides work opportunities, which in turn would enable the building of a national economy. The productivity of such a work force could deci-

sively affect the socio-economic conditions in Jordan and play a major role in confronting the Zionist enemy and its expansionist plans which extend beyond the Jordan River (which separates the occupied West Bank of Palestine from Jordan). However we see that the Jordanian regime gears its economy contrary to this nationalist line. The government does not work to strengthen the role of the productive sectors in the gross national product (total value of commodities produced and services provided in the country). Instead it continuously and noticeably retards the productive sector. Instead of depending on the domestic work force and benefiting from the degree of stability attained in the seventies, the regime has used all possible methods and pressure to force workers to emigrate. The regime has collaborated with the employers and claimed that it was impossible to implement social security and health plans, or to improve wages and working conditions. This has resulted in a clear trend: emigration of the work force, especially to the Gulf states.

The underlying cause of this policy is indeed political. The Jordanian regime obviously encourages emigration in order to lessen internal social and political pressures.

This policy remains in force despite Jordan's objective need for this labor force. There have been great opportunities after the economic upswing that

