

Defense of Democratic Freedoms in Jordan

Jordan has been lacking democracy since the kingdom was established. The constitution does not satisfy the requirements of modern democratic life. Moreover, the authorities have constantly violated the constitution as well as all democratic values. Martial law and emergency provisions have been an integral part of Jordan's political life.

There has been an insistent demand for democratic liberties ever since the national movement and political opposition came into existence. This demand, however, has not had a specific body to defend it. In view of this, a number of people concerned with the issue joined together on their own initiative in Beirut, June 1979, to form the Committees for the Defense of Democratic Freedoms in Jordan. The Committees took a series of steps, making contacts, holding meetings and submitting memoranda to Arab and international bodies concerned with the question of human rights and liberties. The memos aroused interest in these bodies who in turn contacted the Jordanian authorities, and published some of them in their annual reports and other material. After the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, and the departure of most of the leading members of the Committees from Beirut, new contacts were made to organize the resumption of the Committees' activities. As a result the Committees are now led by an expanded and highly qualified General Secretariat.

The Committees welcome into their ranks any democratic organization willing to participate in their activities. The banner for the Committee's work is stepping up the struggle for democratic rights, which is an immediate daily concern of vast sectors of the people in Jordan. The right to political and trade union activities is still fettered by the regime's arbitrary and coercive laws and measures, as are rights to employment, travel, passport and expression.

The Committees for the Defense of Democratic Freedoms in Jordan have now taken a new step by beginning to publish a regular bulletin in Arabic enti-

tled *Democratic Jordan*, to be their mouthpiece in the struggle for democracy. The role of this bulletin is to reinforce the call for democratic liberties, to expose all coercive and arbitrary practices, and to defend all those who are illegally detained, deprived of their basic rights or otherwise mistreated.

1954 Uprising Commemorated

Significantly, the publication of the first issue of *Democratic Jordan* coincided with the 30th anniversary of the popular uprising that occurred in Jordan on October 16, 1954. This was sparked by flagrant fraud in the parliamentary elections, enacted by Tawfiq Abu Huda's government, with a view to sec-

uring a subservient parliamentary majority that would approve linking Jordan to imperialist pacts, and grant the regime a free hand to suppress the mass movement.

The masses in Jordan and the West Bank rose up to reject the authorities' having thus scorned their will. People poured into the streets in thousands, condemning both the electoral manipulation and the regime's policy of subservience to the colonial powers. They shouted for democracy and freeing Jordan from the fetters of colonialism, then symbolized by the 1948 treaty (with Britain), Glub Pasha's control of the army, and the administration of the country by the British Embassy in Amman.

The armed forces were ordered into the streets by General Glub to suppress the demonstrations. In the resulting clashes, scores of patriots were killed or wounded. Yet the uprising was not in vain, for it exposed the bogus character of the emerging parliament, which as a result had to be dissolved. Moreover, the 1954 uprising paved the way for later mass movements protesting Jordan's joining the Baghdad Pact, and demanding that the army be transformed into a patriotic one and that the colonial treaty with Britain be cancelled. It also opened the way for the advent of a patriotic majority in the parliament that was antagonistic towards imperialism and under which, for a time, the country enjoyed relative democratic liberties.

Political Prisoners

Today opposition to the regime's policies continues to be displayed in a variety of ways. One of the most significant is the widespread support expressed to the demands of the political prisoners who waged a courageous hunger strike in March. (See *Democratic Palestine* no. 3). Since then the regime has released some political prisoners while at the same time continuing to detain others. In September, another hunger strike was staged, lasting two weeks, but as yet the regime has not fulfilled the demands for the release of those detained solely on political grounds. One example of public support to the political detainees was the memorandum submitted to the Council of Deputies by 35 signatories representing the popular, trade union and profes-

sional sectors in Karak province. The memo stated in part: *In response to the political detainees' appeal and considering their deteriorated health condition...we herewith declare our solidarity and support their demands, including the release of the detainees from occupied Palestine, particularly those whose term is or almost is over; the release of those arrested on political grounds and those who have not completed their sentence; and the restoration of civil life and the operation of the constitution.*

Also noteworthy was the memorandum to the Prime Minister submitted by the Jordanian Engineers Association in August. While demanding the release of one of their imprisoned colleagues, the Association also linked the demand for