

right down to the recent arrests. The parties are banned and the public forums in which they work, such as trade unions, are themselves subject to restrictions, banning and other harassment. Moreover, some of these parties have suffered from internal problems, and both before and during the election campaign, coordination between the leftist and nationalist forces was minimal or non-existent.

With the Muslim Brotherhood controlling almost half the parliament, it can obviously exert a significant influence on legislation and government policy if it so chooses. The goal of the movement was clearly stated by Sheikh Hammam Said: «We will work hand-in-hand...to make this country an Islamic country in all means and to make Islam the source of all its laws» (AP, November 6th). This has lead some to raise the question of whether the Muslim Brotherhood will constitute the opposition, or whether it will work to destroy the relative democracy that brought its candidates into the parliament. In actual fact, however, the Muslim Brotherhood is the reserve force of the regime, serving to keep the society conservative and thus underpinning the monarchy. Past experience shows that, despite radical-sounding rhetoric, the Muslim Brotherhood will not oppose the regime on significant national issues concerning the conflict with Israel, or the Palestinian question. Certainly, their program is contrary to the measures needed to resolve the economic and social crisis in Jordan, and there is a danger that they will work for social legislation that will restrict the masses' social rights, and be used by the regime to suppress the progressive forces. Already, during the election campaign, the Brotherhood was the main responsible for whipping up conservative attitudes whereby no woman candidate was elected.

The other pole to be evaluated is the leftist and nationalist forces. Though they failed to gain sufficient seats to exert much influence on policy, the elections have created a new situation

for their work. They have new opportunities to use their voices in parliament to raise public debate and consciousness concerning domestic and regional problems - from the need for radical economic reform to Jordan's role in relation to the Palestinian question in the era of the intifada. There are new somewhat broader, margins of democracy for work among the masses, in unions, etc. Concurrently, there is a new chance to structure the coordination among them in order to pursue parliamentary and mass work more effectively.

The new situation has a dual nature: On the one hand, the regime was forced into the elections by the combined impact of the April revolt and the Palestinian intifada, forcing it to reevaluate its policy in a number of fields. On the other hand, the regime is trying to turn this to its own advantage, developing a more democratic facade in order to enhance its own stability and prestige. The ability of the nationalist and leftist forces to chart a course that utilizes the new democratic opportunities to press for fundamental change, is a crucial factor in the coming period.

The parliament convened on November 27, in order to elect its president. The independent MP Suleiman Arrar won over MP Yusef Al Mubaideen who was nominated by the Muslim Brotherhood. In this session, a committee was formed to respond to the king's speech.

The Council of Notables (Senate) - which includes forty prominent figures (retired officials, officers and heads of leading tribes, etc.), appointed by the king, also convened to elect a president and form a similar committee to respond to the King's speech. This council functions as a supplementary legislative body. Its main function is to discuss issues of concern to the parliament and give its opinion.

After parliamentary life was revived in Jordan, the Council of the Nation - which includes members of both the parliament and the Notables' Council - held its first session, where the King

gave his speech. In it, he promised to lift the ban on political organizations. This decision is conditioned on the fact that lifting the ban is not contrary to the new national charter which in turn must conform to the constitution. He mentioned that a royal committee will soon be formed to write the text of the national charter, which will then be ratified by a popular referendum.

The king said that the new government would revive the existing laws that have become an obstacle to social progress. This will provide the special courts sufficient leeway to exercise their duties more efficiently. He confirmed that the government will combat corruption, economic crime and criminals.

On the political level, the king justified severing ties with the West Bank by saying that the uprising had begun a new stage in the Palestinian struggle: The Palestinian people have declared their adherence to the land and their struggle for their just cause. The decision was also a result of the Arab wish to accentuate the Palestinian cause as a people's struggle for national independence. The Palestinian leadership has welcomed it. He emphasized that the Palestinian leadership has diligently worked to advance the peace process, and that Israel is the party that is putting obstacles; he reaffirmed Jordan's commitment to an international conference.

It was noteworthy that martial law was not annulled, even though the revival of parliamentary life means that the country could very well be administered without it. The king promised to punish those who commit economic crimes and are proven to be corrupt. This in itself is positive because it's a popular demand, but what about those who contributed to the deterioration of the economy, and the present economic crisis?

In general, the speech sounded good, but the point is whether it will be put to practice. The future will be the judge of how sincere these promises are.