

vote. At the beginning of February, we will be publishing the lists of registered voters; there will be time allotted for persons to appeal, if they find their names are missing. Then we will publish the list of candidates, again leaving time for appeals. Then, the final candidates' list will appear, and the campaign will officially open. This will all be financed through the government. We want to guarantee equal access to all candidates, to make sure that the population knows the candidates. The campaign will be short, about 10-12 days. Six weeks after the voters' lists have been published, the elections will begin, about mid-March.

EIR: How many candidates will there be?

Nahas: As many as wish to run. The requirements for candidacy are very simple. One must be a Sudanese citizen, 21 (for the National Assembly) or 40 years of age (for the Presidency), of sound mind and body, and without any criminal record. All candidates will have equal access to radio, television, and press, they will all be able to hold rallies. In the past, candidates depended on personal financial resources and on party backing. There were limits posed on campaign expenditures, and each candidate was required to present an audited budget of his expenses, but this was not adhered to.

EIR: Given the continuing war in the south, what are the perspectives for elections being carried out in an orderly fashion there?

Nahas: In the western Gazhal, in the Upper Nile and Juba, there are problems, but when we introduced the permanent group to them, they participated. Seven (of the ten) states have already sent in their lists. It is very important for them to be able to vote. . . .

EIR: Will there be observers at the polling places?

Nahas: By law, there must be observers in the so-called domestic committees. These are made up of members of the Supreme Court, and former senior civil service officials. They must make sure every citizen has a right to vote, and must secure the ballot boxes. The domestic observers will stay until the results are announced. The government wants international observers as well, and has sent out invitations to all relevant regional and international bodies. For example, the OAU [Organization of African Unity], the Arab League, the U.N. electoral unit, the EU [European Union], etc.

EIR: How are members of the opposition responding to the elections?

Nahas: The opposition is mostly outside the country, and is split. Had they so desired, they could have taken part in the state elections, and could have taken over control of the central councils, but they did not. They seem to be aware of their standing among the population. If any opposition leader wants to run for office, his candidacy will certainly be accepted. The government is confident. . . .

Jordan

Cabinet reshuffle portends confrontation

by Our Special Correspondent

Anyone who was caught unawares by the Jordanian government reshuffle announced on Feb. 5, has only himself to blame. If there had been no other hints of such a major political shift, there was the Shubeilat affair, to send a loud and clear signal, that something big was afoot.

The Shubeilat affair concerns a former independent Islamist member of parliament, currently on trial in Amman, for *lèse-majesté*, and shaking public confidence in the economy and currency of the kingdom. Laith Shubeilat's crime, was to criticize the manner in which King Hussein has been pushing through the "normalization" process with Israel, and the economic liberalization policy which the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank have attached to that process. Although Shubeilat's rejection of the peace agreement with Israel on ideological grounds, may not be shared universally, there is certainly a majority of the Jordanian population which has serious misgivings about aspects of the new arrangements in the region.

The main bones of contention are three: economic policy, relations with Israel (and the United States), and posture toward Iraq. Contrary to promises made at the time of the 1994 treaty with Israel, the "peace dividend" has not been forthcoming, in terms of improved living standards for the population. Instead of vast infrastructure projects, the country has embarked on a series of tourism-oriented projects. To attract foreign investment, Jordan has obeyed the recommendations of the IMF and World Bank, lifting subsidies, protective tariffs, and controls on foreign ownership of land. The rush into privatization, has led to increases in the price of basic goods, creating hardship for the working man and woman.

What has irked even loyalists, supportive of peace with Israel, is the pace and manner in which the "normalization" has been driven forward. Jordanians complain that they feel their country has become a "protectorate" of Israel, and of the United States. Recent military agreements announced on the occasion of U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry's visit to the region, for the delivery of F-16s and for training of Jordanian forces, have raised suspicions that the kingdom is being groomed to take over security responsibilities for large parts of the region.

Neither relations with Israel, nor a beefed up U.S. presence, would have provoked such violent political reactions, had it not been for the fact that Jordan seemed to turn its back on its longtime ally, Iraq, at the same time. Regarding Iraq, Jordan has undergone a shift in outlook, particularly since the August 1995 defection of high-ranking Iraqi figures, who found refuge in Amman. King Hussein's proposal to sponsor a conference of Iraqi opposition figures, to create the conditions for a post-Saddam, federated Iraq, has been reiterated on every feasible occasion, leaving no doubt that the ill-advised plan is being seriously considered. The Swiss daily *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* pointed out Feb. 6, that the Palestinians in Jordan, who constitute the majority of the population, cannot and will not tolerate a break in relations with Iraq, for which they feel solidarity, particularly if it is replaced by warmer relations with the "traditional enemy," Israel.

Regardless of the fact that popular discontent was significant, and growing, King Hussein decided to surge ahead with "normalization," as if driven by the demands of a discreet deadline, and, consequently opted for confrontation with any and all opposition. Thus, the Shubeilat affair, which began in early December. Shubeilat is president of the 35,000-strong Jordanian Engineers Association, which, like the other major professional association, opposes "normalization." Putting him on trial was a way of decapitating this opposition; announcing plans to redraft legislation regulating their activities, and that of the press, was a way of driving the point home.

The government reorganization

Now, the government has undergone wholesale reorganization, to the same purpose. The new prime minister presiding over the 31-man cabinet is former Foreign Minister Abdul Karim Al Kabariti, who will maintain that post and cover the Defense Ministry as well. The fact that King Hussein felt it necessary to replace his cousin and long-term confidant, Zaid Ben Shagr, as prime minister, shows just how far the anti-opposition purge reaches. Ben Shagr, who had accepted responsibility several times before, to preside over governments assigned rather delicate tasks (including an earlier trial against the popular Shubeilat), has been ousted, apparently because he, too, was less than enthusiastic about the break with Iraq. Kabariti is considered malleable, to put it mildly. He will be fully supported by his close friend Awn Al Kasawneh, who has been appointed head of the Royal Court. Also at the Royal Court, the former head of General Intelligence, Mustafa Qaisi, has been appointed an adviser to the king, to replace one of three who quit their posts in the general upheaval.

On the policy level, Kabariti can be expected to accelerate "normalization" with Israel, continue the IMF-directed process of liberalization, and mediate closer relations with the Gulf States, at the expense of links to Iraq. On the eve of the

reshuffle, Jordan announced that it was halving its exports to Iraq, and shortly thereafter the Saudis announced they would be willing to supply Jordan with oil, presumably to replace what the kingdom had been receiving from Iraq. The king is scheduled to travel to Saudi Arabia, probably for a summit with King Fahd, or Prince Abdullah, before the middle of February.

The new prime minister has a lot of enemies. He has come under attack by the Islamic faction in Parliament for his pro-Israel stance. He has been assailed by Iraqi Foreign Minister Al Sahaf since mid-January, for his having interfered into the internal affairs of Iraq. This refers to Kabariti's endorsement of King Hussein's proposed opposition conference. Kabariti has also drawn fire from Damascus, for his new Gulf policy.

But the prime minister will certainly have the full support of his new ministers.

The cabinet is almost more royalist than the king, as the saying goes. The ministers can be classified according to the following categories: those who were actively involved in negotiating the peace treaty with Israel, and fully support "normalization," those who have distinguished themselves for attacking the opposition (even physically), and those who belong to tribes loyal to the crown. In the first category, are Planning Minister Khalaf, Trade and Industry Minister Abul Ragheb, and Minister of Information Marwan Muasher, who was Jordan's first ambassador to Israel. In the second category, are many ministers who are "on the black list" of the Islamic Action Front (IAF), the main opposition bloc in Parliament. Two Members of Parliament, Abdul Salam Al Abadi and Hisham Al Tal, whom the IAF had tried to oust four weeks ago, have become ministers. Almost all the new cabinet members have taken part in heated debates which often degenerated into fistfights in Parliament; those who confronted the IAF seem to have been rewarded with a ministerial post. This is the case of Mufieh Rheimi, minister of state, who went into a physical clash with the Islamists recently. Also of note, is Minister of Justice Abdul Karim Al Dughmi, who made the front page of the *Jordan Times* on Jan. 29, for insulting an IAF deputy, Sheik Abu Zant. It is no coincidence, that the subject of the altercation was the Shubeilat affair; the Islamist parliamentarian had proposed that it be discussed in Parliament, to which Al Dughmi responded with epithets.

Finally, there is the family affiliation factor, which is not insignificant in a country with a tribal structure and heritage. Unlike other governments, 70% of the new cabinet members are members of Parliament, which means, they were elected in the 1993 elections, according to the new law which favored tribal candidacies. Mustafa Shueikat, minister of agriculture, is from an important tribe around Amman; Abdul Hadi Al Majali, minister of public works and housing, has a huge tribe in the south; Abdallah Ensour, minister of higher education, represents a powerful tribe from Salt, the "second capital" of Jordan; Mohammed Daondieh, minister of youth, is from a

large tribe in Tafila, Shubeilat's home town; Abdul Karim Al Dughmi, minister of justice, is a parliamentarian from Mafraq, from the Beni Hasan tribe; Naser Al Lawzi, minister of transport, whose father is head of the senate, represents the big Lawzi tribe; Jamal Saraireh, minister of post and communications, is from a tribe in Karak; Hammad Abu Jamoius, minister of social development, is leader of the Deajah tribe, which owns land in and around Amman; Abdul Salam Al Abbadi, minister of Awqaf and religious affairs, comes from the Hleifat tribes in Irbid. Not only are the tribal groupings traditionally the base of support for the king, but historically, British influence has been exercised through manipulation of tribal loyalties. Mohammed Odeh Njadat, one of the new ministers of state in the reshuffled cabinet, is from the bedouin tribe Huhuweitat, the tribe which fought with the notorious Lawrence of Arabia.

What the composition of the government spells is con-

frontation. An editor of a Jordanian weekly, in discussion with *EIR*, characterized the new government members as "poised for action against the Islamists." When asked for clarification, he said, "It will be a confrontationist government. I am thinking along the lines of what is happening in Egypt." In short, the new government can be expected to move energetically and fearlessly against any and all opposition, be it from Parliament, the press, or the professional associations. Whether or not this confrontationism will reach Egyptian proportions, where opponents are not only muzzled and thrown into jail, but also disappear, is an important question. The danger inherent in the new situation, lies in the possibility that what should have been the stuff of healthy political debate, will become the ignited fuse for social confrontation. Although the situation in Jordan is much changed from what it was in 1970, the specter of Black September still looms in memory. And Shubeilat remains a political prisoner.

Rima Shubeilat calls for a free press in Jordan

The following Open Letter was issued to the president and members of the executive committee of the Journalists Association, in Jordan, by Rima Shubeilat, wife of Laith Shubeilat.

When the daily papers that have the motto: "I only hear what the government hears, I only see what it sees, and I only write what pleases it," become a model and a standard to be desired for the media, and when the weekly papers are considered to cross over the red lines, then things have certainly reached a terrible stage.

Your Association and your good self (as chief editor of one of the most important daily papers) are responsible for this abhorred regression that is dubbed "an advancing democratic process." Is the problem really the recently established weekly papers, or is it the mature, nay aged, dailies? Or is it the clinical death of the media?

To give one example, let us consider the 180-degree turn against Iraq. . . . The government changed its attitude toward Iraq, and the papers could only resist that change for one week, and then started to be their masters' voice. In some cases, the same article appeared in all papers, to prove the journalistic "creativity" and "freedom."

In the Shubeilat affair, which moved a large number of people to defend the freedom of opinion, we find that the papers have chosen total silence . . . for they found nothing important to deserve mention. Our papers were

more free during the reign of martial law.

The issue is not Shubeilat the man, but Shubeilat the cause. How can the papers not have an opinion when the conditions of arrest are so harsh? When his visitors are harassed and interrogated? How can this be, when international papers write about the affair every day? Is the pretext "not influencing the course of justice," a credible excuse [for the Jordanian press not to cover it]?!

Please do not think that we are asking you for a certain type of coverage. I am certain that the daily press does not even dare criticize Shubeilat for two reasons: First, the article would backfire, just as it did when the minister of culture replied to a letter from Shubeilat that was not published, and did not even abide by the law that gives Shubeilat the right to reply. Second, an article critical of Shubeilat will prompt other articles to defend him, thus creating an atmosphere of debate that allows differences of opinion to be settled; but the "democrats" prefer to settle those differences in court!

Before Shubeilat was arrested, the press covered extensively the rebellion of the "silent majority" against the president of the Engineers' Association. Yet it did not publish the reply of the elected executive of the Association. Thus the press favored ten people and neglected the 35,000 other engineers.

Gentlemen,

I call upon you to rescind your attitudes that helped gag the press and its independence. I call upon you to stop pressuring the weekly press.

Laith is in jail, yet his spirit is free. . . . I hope that those whose bodies are free would free their own souls and opinions.