

# Arrest of Laith Shubeilat places Jordanian democracy in jeopardy

by Hussein Nadeem

Laith Shubeilat, the leading figure in the Jordanian opposition, was arrested on Dec. 9, 1995, and accused of having slandered the king, as well as having undermined the economy and currency of the nation. The mode of his arrest, the political circumstances surrounding it, and the implications of the charges, have raised a furor in the country and abroad.

According to reports of his colleagues, wife, and lawyer, Shubeilat was arrested in an unconventional manner. His home and office were subjected to search and seal operations on the part of the authorities, without his permission or valid search warrants. As his wife declared in a press release (see *Documentation*), the prosecuting authorities attempted to arrest her son and the family's chauffeur, and succeeded in confiscating documents and Mr. Shubeilat's car. One colleague of Mr. Shubeilat was confined to a room, while the search of the office was conducted.

When he was informed of the facts, Shubeilat called an impromptu press conference, to explain to the media why he was being arrested, and then turned himself in. He was taken into custody for two weeks, without bail, although the charges do not justify such treatment under Jordanian law. He was interrogated daily until Dec. 19, when he refused to answer questions he said were not related to the accusations. Although suffering from chronic arthritis and arthrosis, Shubeilat has been held in solitary confinement in an unheated cell, without warm water. He was denied for several weeks the right to be visited by his wife or other family members.

As Rima Shubeilat points out in her declaration, it is not clear why the authorities should conduct searches and confiscate material, considering that the charges brought against him were reportedly based on remarks he had made during a public lecture. The lecture in question had taken place one full month earlier, on Nov. 7, in the northern city of Irbid. In it, Shubeilat reportedly presented a critical view of the history of the Hashemite dynasty. The lecture, which was public, was later published, so there was no apparent need to conduct searches.

## Challenge to IMF austerity policy

The basis for the remaining charges, of "undermining the country's financial status" and "shaking the confidence in

the Jordanian dinar," as summarized by the *Jordan Times* account on Dec. 12, appears to be a series of statements, again made in public, by Shubeilat regarding the effect on Jordan's economy of the measures introduced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

On the "recommendation" of the International Monetary Fund, Jordan has lifted protective tariffs and many subsidies, liberalized investment and tax laws, and loosened restrictions on foreign purchase of land in Jordan. It has started privatization of State-controlled industries. The effects of such measures have been the same in Jordan as they have in virtually all other countries where they have been applied: inflation, lowered living standards, currency devaluation. Shubeilat, as the president of the Jordanian Engineers Association, was joined by other professional unions in resisting efforts to impose the IMF measures. Simultaneous with his arrest came the news that the government was preparing amendments in legislation governing the activity of the unions, and was about to introduce changes in press law, to limit criticism of government policy.

As Shubeilat said, in his press conference prior to being arrested, the unions were being threatened with political curbs, because they "have been leading the struggle of the professionals, and the masses behind them, to protest the low living standard, rise of prices, collapse of wages, and the handing of the professionals to foreign investors as cheap labor."

Shubeilat also talked about the Middle East and North Africa economic summit, held in Jordan in late October. The associations had boycotted the summit, limiting the participation of professionals. At the summit, the full array of IMF measures for a "free-market" economy was presented and accepted by the gathering. Shubeilat said, "At the Amman conference, foreign investors celebrated this 'economic feast' and the victory of the slogan, 'profit is the absolute value,' while every other concept of development which has become coupled with the term 'social development,' a nice name which they mention to the unions, falls apart around that slogan. They do this in order to prevent anyone from stopping their looting the country. If the State truly says that the political conflict is gone and the means of conflict now is

economic, then the unions must have a political representation because they are the people's biggest partner and the most targetted by the conservatives, market economy capital, and the International Monetary Fund." Shubeilat was quoted as forecasting that the prices of bread and water would increase dramatically within weeks. He said he believed that, if present trends were to continue, then popular protest against declining living standards could not be ruled out. The reference was to widespread riots and demonstrations that broke out in 1989, precisely in response to such IMF-style austerity measures.

Thus, his rejection of "free-market" economics is the real basis on which the charges have been levelled. Although it can be demonstrated, that it is the IMF policies which have produced the deleterious economic effects mentioned, the authorities have attempted to lay the blame on the person

who has spoken up about it. This is perhaps the first time that a public figure in Jordan has been incriminated for having told the truth about the IMF.

Shubeilat has denied all the charges brought against him. If convicted, he could face up to three years in prison. If further charges are added to the indictment, relating to incitement to insurrection, sedition, or the like, he would risk a more severe punishment of 20 years to life in prison.

### A political hot potato

Immediately following the arrest, the associations and many political figures mobilized for Shubeilat's immediate release. The case quickly turned from a legal and security issue into a major political question, which aroused the concern of most of the population, especially the professional and political circles, regarding the political and economic

## Who is Laith Shubeilat?

Laith Shubeilat is a 52-year-old Jordanian, from a prominent political family. His father was close to the king, serving as a minister as well as an ambassador for several years. Laith Shubeilat entered Parliament as an independent Islamist in 1989, when democracy was reintroduced in Jordan. He was elected by an overwhelming mandate, from voters in the Third District of Amman. His was the highest total for any single candidate, which made him the most popular personality in the country, outside the royal family.

In 1992, Shubeilat was arrested and charged with plotting the overthrow of the monarchy. He was accused of belonging to a group called Shabab al Nafeer (the Vanguard of Islamic Youth). After a railroad trial before a security court, which involved testimony by phony witnesses, he was convicted, and sentenced to 20 years of hard labor. Later, he was freed under the terms of a general amnesty granted by the king.

Shubeilat refused to run for re-election in 1993, in protest against the change in electoral laws, which he denounced as a blow to Jordan's democratic system. After thus leaving a political career, Shubeilat was elected president of the Jordanian Engineers Association (JEA), the most powerful of the dozen or so professional unions which represent the country's doctors, engineers, lawyers, and so forth. From that position, he has become the de facto leader of the opposition to "normalization" with Israel.

Shubeilat has campaigned in Jordan, and throughout the Arab and Islamic world, against the policies of the



*Five days before his arrest, Laith Shubeilat was told by a government minister that "it would be better" if he did not run for re-election as head of the powerful Jordan Engineers Association.*

International Monetary Fund, and for a new, just world economic order. Although he differs with Lyndon LaRouche on Middle East policy, Shubeilat campaigned for LaRouche's liberation and exoneration, organizing broad support throughout the Muslim intelligentsia. Shubeilat has also been active in efforts to forge an ecumenical alliance of the monotheistic religious traditions, on the basis of a commitment to the principle, that all men are created in the image of God the Creator. He has lectured widely throughout the world, and has authored numerous articles and essays.

future of the country.

Numerous committees were established, on the public as well as the professional unions level, calling for freedom for Shubeilat. Working groups were set up within the associations to deal with various aspects of the case. At least 32 lawyers declared their willingness to join Shubeilat's main lawyer, Jawad Younis, in his defense. Among them was Ahmed Obeidat, a former prime minister of Jordan.

More significant is that his case has become the major issue in the debates of the Jordanian Parliament, especially the economic deterioration of the country which Shubeilat had been criticizing. Reports in the Jordanian daily *Ad-Dustour* on Dec. 14, confirmed that a hot debate took place between the representatives in Parliament and the prime minister on the issues of rising prices and falling wages.

On Dec. 12, a message denouncing the arrest of Shubeilat was sent by the Assembly of the Professional Unions to Prime Minister Zaid Bin Shakir. The unions, which represent the physicians, dentists, pharmacists, lawyers, civil engineers, and agricultural engineers in Jordan, whose members number 35,000 of the best educated people in the country, said that the charges against Shubeilat had to do with his having expressed his opinion, which is a freedom protected by Jordanian law. They supported Shubeilat's analysis of the deteriorating living standard, collapse of wages, and spread of poverty in the middle class, and they demanded his immediate release.

A message by the Federation of Arab Engineers was sent to the government demanding the release of Shubeilat. The statement reminded the government of the economic and political role the professional unions have played in Jordan, and highlighted Shubeilat's role in this. The Arab Organization for Human Rights in Jordan also issued a release, declaring that the way Laith Shubeilat was arrested and his house was searched was a great violation of human rights. The organization asserted its belief that the motives for the arrest were "purely political."

Many other associations, unions, political parties, groups, and individuals in Jordan, the Arab world, and in Europe have supported the views of Laith Shubeilat on economic policy and bolstered his criticism of the kingdom's foreign policy, especially regarding Iraq. Among these groups are the Association for Opposing Zionism and Racism, Jordan; the Spanish United Left in Parliament; the Green List in the Jordanian Engineers Association; the Public Council of the city of Tufaila; the Professional Unions of the city of Irbid; nine opposition parties in the Jordanian Parliament; the Federal Union of Lebanese Engineers; former Jordanian Prime Minister Ahmed Obeidat; and Father George Al-Far, head of the Hajazin Christians; the international Schiller Institute; and, three leading Academicians from Moscow.

Kuzin, a democratic activist in Moscow, sent a letter to Jordanian Prosecutor General Mahmoud Mansour Obeidat,

to protest Shubeilat's arrest. Kuzin writes that he was the "cofounder in 1988 of the Democratic Union Party, the first anticommunist party in the U.S.S.R. during perestroika." Kuzin stresses that the fight against International Monetary Fund policies waged by Shubeilat, is of vital importance for Jordan. "For you," he writes, "it is useful to learn from our experience. Even such a rich country as Russia now is almost totally plundered, its industrial potential is going to zero, its population is rapidly dying out due to the generalized application of the IMF's 'free market' economic doctrine."

As soon as the support came pouring in, the authorities moved to suppress it. Reports from Amman indicated that in the third week of December, Jordanian newspapers were silent about the case, and many foreign newspapers were not available in the country. Persons distributing material in support of Shubeilat's freedom were put under pressure. Such tactics underlined the point evident from the onset, that the fate of Shubeilat carries with it the fate of democracy in Jordan.

---

## Documentation

---

### Rima Shubeilat appeals for her husband's release

*Rima Shubeilat, the wife of Laith Shubeilat, issued the following statement on Dec. 18.*

Laith, the defender of the poor and the conscience of the Jordanian people, is still under arrest and put under serious psychological conditions. His children and wife are denied the right to visit him, while pressure is increasing on his friends and relatives to prevent them from supporting him. The State's media and press present only the government's viewpoints and the prosecutor's. All which appears in the press is material aiming at defaming my husband, and at the same time praising the attitudes through which the government wants to direct the "facts."

I look with concern and suspense at what the Prosecutor General said to newspapers. He claims that he did not try to arrest my son, Farhan, and use him as a hostage a few hours before Laith's arrest. He also denied arresting the family chauffeur, and confiscating papers that belong to my husband. What happened that day, was that at 7:00 a.m., which is the time when my children go to school, the Prosecutor General, Mahmoud Mansour Obeidat, came together with a

police force to our house and demanded that they search the house. I asked him to present a search warrant, and he replied that "being Prosecutor General, he needs no written permission." The car and chauffeur were taken and released three hours later. Documents and other written material belonging to my husband were confiscated.

My concern and fear come from a previous experience when my husband was arrested for a serious political charge. The prosecutor, then [in 1992], said that Laith's car was in "safe hands." Shortly after that, the prosecutor came out in public saying that "many surprises are on the way," and that he had in his possession "large amounts of evidence." Each of these "surprises" was related to a date following the date of his declaration. Later, witnesses came "on their free will" to testify falsely against my husband, in a clear fraud. That was used to sentence my husband to actual physical death, despite the psychological impact which this had to defame him. Later, the charge of insulting the king was made to mobilize public emotions against Laith. Moreover, other charges were glued to the list of charges: insulting the government of Iraq, which had a great impact on the Jordanian people who sympathized with Iraq. After this tragi-comedy, the prosecutor contradicted all the previous charges by inventing a new charge: "conspiring to blow up the U.S. Embassy in Amman"(?!). The case of falsifying

the testimony of the witness, Ali Shakarshi, was revealed by his German attorneys, immediately after Shakarshi went back to Germany (where he used to live). Laith, later, presented the documentation on the fraud committed against him to the Jordanian Parliament, trying to save our country's pride. Copies of these revelations were sent to international human rights organizations and people in Jordan and abroad as well.

If the charge against my husband is *lèse majesté*, then, practically, he must have had done that *in public* before the date of his arrest. So, why should the police search Laith's house and office, and why should his and his colleagues' office be closed that day, in addition to closing the telephone transmission and insulting the employees? Should a man in the position of chairman of the Engineers Union of a country be arrested in a lawyer's office arbitrarily, instead of summoning him through telephone or mail, according to the law? It must be also borne in mind that the Prosecutor General has practiced pressure and suppression against my husband in order to derive a testimony for a felony which he had not committed, at the same time that we, his family and his attorneys, were not allowed to visit him.

I appeal to all Parliament members, humanitarian organizations, and unions to do their best to ensure the immediate release of my husband.



## LaRouche Campaign Is On the Internet!

Lyndon LaRouche's Democratic presidential primary campaign has established a World Wide Web site on the Internet. The "home page" brings you recent policy statements by the candidate as well as a brief biographical resumé.

**TO REACH** the LaRouche page on the Internet:

<http://www.clark.net/larouche/welcome.html>

**TO REACH** the campaign by electronic mail:

[larouche@clark.net](mailto:larouche@clark.net)

Paid for by Committee to Reverse the Accelerating Global Economic and Strategic Crisis: A LaRouche Exploratory Committee.

## So, You Wish To Learn All About Economics?

by Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr.

A text on elementary mathematical economics, by the world's leading economist. Find out why *EIR* was right, when everyone else was wrong.

Order from:

**Ben Franklin Booksellers, Inc.**  
107 South King Street Leesburg, VA 22075

**\$10** plus shipping (\$1.50 for first book, \$.50 for each additional book). Bulk rates available. Information on bulk rates and videotape available on request.

