

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.