

A qualitative change has taken place in the press. The Jordanian media are now presenting criticism and the uncensored views of the opposition. Essentially, censorship has disappeared.

The other issue we are concerned about in the parliament is the devastated economy. The continuing high prices, inflation, unemployment, etc., still constitute a big worry for us. We have insistently raised the issue of the economic crisis and holding those responsible accountable. The government has promised to investigate this issue and has given the financial committee of the parliament complete authority to follow up this matter.

We have also raised the issue of the high percentage of foreign labor in the country. The government's reaction was positive. Regarding this issue, the government responded by making a decision to stop importing foreign laborers and to cease renewing their work permits. Local laborers are to replace foreigners with the exception, of course, of certain sectors where local workers are not available or qualified, such as in nursing and agriculture.

We were confronted with the obstacle of private employers who prefer to hire foreign laborers. Some of the owners of private businesses went as far as threatening the government with closing down their businesses if they were forced to replace their foreign workers by locals. This, needless to say, would be harmful to the economy. We have called on the private sector to contribute to improving the economic situation by helping us to resolve the problem of unemployment.

Moreover, there is the problem of the government finding the funds to cover subsidies on basic foodstuffs, and the scarcity of hard currency.



We have noted that the budget for 1990 does not provide for reforms in the economy; meanwhile, the debt crisis still exists; the government has submitted to the IMF's conditions; and there is still heavy dependence on foreign aid, inflation, etc. What is your analysis?

I agree that the steps taken so far in regards to economic reforms are merely temporary measures. Radical steps to reverse the economic faults that have accumulated over the years haven't taken place yet. In fact, the 1990 budget was drawn up prior to the new situation. The economic structure in Jordan is deformed. The budget does not propose any new projects, but only the financing of existing ones.

Concerning the debt, some within the government have asked us - the leftists - to demand the cancellation of all agreements with the IMF, and for Jordan to say *no* to repaying its debts. We didn't openly declare that Jordan won't pay, but Jordan will not pay. I say this to explain that the government realizes that the debt problem is grave, and that it has no means to pay.

As for aid and loans, I want to emphasize that we are not against loans. Some loans, such as development loans, are beneficial. I don't believe that any country can do without loans. We must, however, differentiate between development loans and loans that are just used to cover expenses. I believe that a large portion of our outstanding loans are high-interest, which has contributed to the debt crisis. Personally, I'm not against development loans because they have a low-interest rate and a tolerable defrayment period. Usually, there is a five to six-year period, where the government doesn't have to repay anything, and a 15 to 16-year defrayment period, which is very reasonable, if the loan was invested in a good economic project. In the past, particularly during Rifai's government, high-interest loans were taken and used to finance the budget deficit and pay salaries.

To go back to the issue of democratic freedoms, we hear of some violations such as refusing to grant entrance permits at the borders to individuals residing abroad. How do you explain this and do you discuss these issues in the parliament?

To be honest with you, we in the parliament until now haven't paid enough attention to the issue of citizens abroad, simply because we were busy with the domestic situation. Personally, although I realize that there is a great number of Jordanian citizens living outside Jordan, and they have many problems, I believe that resolving our internal problems is the first priority, taking into consideration the time factor. The new parliament has only been in session for three months. We realize that not paying enough attention to this issue is a shortcoming, but when we see that there are hundreds of citizens who have not had passports or even family records for 40 years, and their sons are drafted but meanwhile deprived of admission to universities, etc., we feel that our duty is to resolve their problems first.

This issue was raised once in the parliament at the same