

Israeli Labor Party Peace Candidate, Mitzna, Under Attack

by Dean Andromidas

A political assault has been launched against Haifa Mayor Amram Mitzna, who is running for the leadership of the Israeli Labor Party. Mitzna, who had been a close collaborator of slain Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, has been openly challenging the national unity government led by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his Labor Party partners, Defense Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres. Mitzna is demanding that unconditional peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians begin immediately, and has called for ending the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The attacks on Mitzna are aimed at sabotaging his bid to win the chairmanship of the Labor Party in its elections on Nov. 19 (see *EIR*, Aug. 23, 2002).

This assault is being led by extremists linked to the Likud party's Ariel Sharon and former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as well as the right wing of the Labor Party, led by current party chairman Ben-Eliezer.

On Oct. 13, Mitzna was questioned by police for eight hours as part of an investigation into alleged campaign financing violations, as the result of an attempt to entrap him into accepting large illegal foreign financial contributions. This entrapment was led by one Aviad Visoly, who is linked to Netanyahu and opposes any negotiation with the Palestinians.

Speaking to the press prior to his interrogation, Mitzna charged that the investigation was part of the "undemocratic ways" in which he is being attacked. He declared that he had committed no crime. "I am coming here with my own truth. It seems that I am threatening several candidates and they cannot deal with my threat by normal means." After leaving the interrogation, he said, "In a democratic country, people are innocent until proven guilty. . . . At the end of all this, it will be clear that this was nothing but a political witch-hunt that did not succeed."

Visoly's Big Business and Bimbos

A look at the background of Aviad Visoly, the organizer of this attempt to incriminate Mitzna, explains a great deal about this effort at character assassination. Visoly told the

press that he is a "right-wing activist" who wants to prove that Mitzna, contrary to his popular image, is corrupt. Mitzna has been mayor of Haifa for almost ten years and is very popular, with support across the entire political spectrum in the city, including among the large Israeli Arab community, and even among the local leadership of the Likud. Visoly's sting involved an attempt to make large, bogus contributions, in excess of legal limits, to Mitzna's campaign. Early in September, Visoly approached individuals on the fringes of Mitzna's campaign organization, for this purpose. Although the funds were never accepted, Visoly gave a press conference with his story and filed a criminal complaint against Mitzna, thus initiating the official investigation.

On Sept. 14, after Visoly made his claims, Mitzna told a press conference, "They tried to trap me in a sting operation using gangster-style tactics of the mafia, but my political experience saved me from falling for it. They tried to make an illegal contribution in order to incriminate me and present me and my campaign as corrupt and dishonest, but at the last moment we stopped it, before damage could be done."

Visoly's charges got the vocal support of Deputy Defense Minister Weizmann Shiri, who is a well-known crony of Labor Party Chairman Ben-Eliezer, who fears that Mitzna will defeat him in the party election. Since Visoly openly supports former Likud Prime Minister Netanyahu, such backing from Ben-Eliezer and his cronies demonstrates that the attack is across party lines.

Visoly's background indicates that he is more than just a "right-wing activist," but is in fact a hard-core political-intelligence operative on behalf of extremist circles in both Israel and the United States.

From his base in Haifa, Visoly is a leader of an organization called "Cities for the Land of Israel." A look at his website (www.match.org) reveals a group that organizes demonstrations and other grassroots activities in support of the "Land of Israel"—by which they mean the continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, in violation of the Oslo peace accords. This organization is linked up with all the other organizations of the extreme right-wing nationalist camp, the spawning ground of the murderer of



Haifa Mayor Amram Mitzna (left), who is challenging Binyamin Ben-Eliezer (right) in a bid for leadership of the Labor Party, has suddenly been hit by a scandal orchestrated by opponents of his peace platform.

Prime Minister Rabin.

Visoly claims to have lived in the United States for 14 years, where he owned several successful businesses. He sold them four years ago, using the money to move back to Israel and devote all his time to political activities.

An *EIR* investigation revealed a somewhat different story. According to the Florida state companies register, Visoly owned six companies, all of which are currently inactive and three of which were “involuntarily dissolved.” None were involved in advanced technology and construction, contradicting a claim he had made to the Israeli media.

One of these, American Dream Company, casts light on his connections in the United States. Visoly told *EIR* that that company was formed to conduct interviews with celebrities, which were then sold to the media. He offered no other details except that the Israeli journalist Daphne Barak, who was also a director of the company, conducted the interviews.

According to one senior Israeli journalist, Barak is “sort of a bimbo,” who was “not among the first class of journalists.” Although Barak is known for interviewing such show business personalities as Michael Jackson, she also interviewed British Prime Minister Tony Blair. More interesting is the fact that she interviewed Linda Tripp and Paula Jones of Clintongate infamy, and claimed that President Bill Clinton had made a pass at her, too.

Interviews with Tripp and Jones were not easy to come by. All such interviews were arranged by Lucianne Goldberg, who, through her neo-conservative salon in New York City, functioned as “controller” of Tripp and Jones, on behalf of the British-steered operation to impeach Clinton. Goldberg worked with operatives from the Mellon Scaife Foundation and special prosecutor Kenneth Starr. This makes for an intriguing possible link between Visoly and this anti-Clinton operation.

Daphne Barak is also close to Howard Rubinstein, who runs one of the most powerful and influential public relations

firms in New York City. The extremely politically well-connected Rubinstein happens to handle the public relations for pop star Michael Jackson—as well as for the government of Prime Minister Sharon. In Rubinstein’s class, “public relations” does not mean putting out a few press releases, but ruthlessly using his tremendous influence in the U.S. media on behalf of his clients.

Political Battle Intersects Economic Collapse

The elimination of Mitzna from the political scene is important for the pro-war faction in both Israel and Washington. Sharon is banking on a war with Iraq in order for him to stay in power and implement his “final solution” for the Palestinians, through their forcible “transfer” out of the “Land of Israel.” Sharon needs a war within the next weeks or months, because the longer war is postponed, the greater the chances are that his government coalition will collapse, leading to early elections.

A collapse of Sharon’s government will be triggered by the catastrophic economic situation, which is only getting worse. The International Monetary Fund announced that the Israeli economy will register a negative growth of 1.5% for the first time since the founding of the State of Israel. The standard of living has collapsed by 6%, with unemployment expected to top 12% by the end of the year—also the highest since the founding of the state. Thirty thousand independent companies collapsed last year, and another 50,000—one in seven—are expected to fold this year. The collapse of tourism has left hotels with occupancy rates of only 10%. With inflation running at 7%, Israelis are sending their money out of the country. In the first six months of this year, \$2.6 billion fled Israel, twice the amount as the year before.

The economic crisis is having a big impact on the population, particularly lower-income families and the unemployed. On Oct. 14, more than 600 activists representing various social organizations held a meeting in a hall in the Israeli Knesset (parliament), which was attended also by Members of the Knesset from the opposition pro-peace Meretz party, and by members of the pro-peace faction in the Labor Party. These activists committed themselves to lobby Knesset Members against the brutal austerity budget that the Sharon government hopes to pass in the current Knesset session. If the budget fails, new elections would result.

Since everyone knows the economy will never revive as long as the war with the Palestinians continues, a strong pro-peace candidate who directly addresses the economic crisis, as has Mitzna, could very well have a decisive impact in the elections. For Sharon and the others, including the war party in Washington, the danger is that Mitzna, once he captures the leadership of the Labor Party, could ally with Meretz and other smaller parties, such as the ethnic-Russian Democratic Choice party, and transform the Israeli political scene, putting the country back on the road to peace.