

Will Sharon Become Israel's Ceausescu?

by Dean Andromidas

On the eve of Israel's Jan. 28 election, there were fears that a victory by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Likud party could lead to the collapse of the democratic state in Israel. Faced with two ongoing and escalating criminal investigations, Sharon marshalled support of Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein, in a reckless and patently illegal attempt to block the investigation with the powers of government, threatening the investigators, press, and political opposition.

A leading Belgian jurist told *EIR* that Sharon's is "classic move by a politician who is exposed by the press to be under criminal investigation, to try to sabotage that investigation, by claiming the case is politically motivated and part of a conspiracy to destroy him. The politician then tries to put the investigators, political, opposition and the media on trial."

Recalling Richard Nixon's reaction to the Watergate break-in in 1972, Sharon has lied to the investigating authorities and the Israeli population concerning the charges. On Jan. 9, he called televised press conference, in which he claimed that Labor Party Chairman Amram Mitzna was behind a "conspiracy to topple the Prime Minister." So outrageous was Sharon's performance, that the chairman of the Election Commission, a Supreme Court judge, ordered the broadcast to be cut off in mid-air.

Now Attorney General Rubinstein has chosen to play the role of Nixon's Attorney General, John Mitchell: full partner in an illegal coverup and a *Nacht und Nebel*-style repression of the official investigators and the free press. As documents were leaked to the press, which indicated that Sharon was under investigation for receiving an illegal \$1.5 million loan, Rubinstein ordered the arrest on Jan. 21 of state prosecutor Liora Glatt-Berkovich for the leak. At 2 a.m. the next morning, the Justice Ministry began calling the Israeli press corps to announce her arrest, as if it were some major coup to defend the national security.

Then early on Jan. 22, after Glatt-Berkovich had confessed to her "great crime," Israeli police were ordered to call in *Ha'aretz* investigative journalist Baruch Kra and TV journalist Moshe Nussbaum for questioning, demanding that they reveal their sources or be accused of "obstruction of justice." This created national outrage. As in any society which claims to be democratic—and upheld in Israel by the Supreme Court—journalists maintain the right to protect the confidentiality of their sources. Rubinstein, feeling the heat,

gave a press conference at noon, to defend the arrest, using the justification that the Glatt-Berkovich leaked the documents on "ideological grounds." Thus he publicly supported Sharon's claim of a "conspiracy to overthrow the Prime Minister." Rubinstein insisted that he launched the investigation, because of "the obstruction and damage caused to the Sharon investigation by the leak, and the suspicion, which unfortunately came true, that a source from the government made the political move in this sensitive period prior to the elections."

Why the Document Was Leaked

When journalists asked what he meant by "ideologically motivated," Rubinstein at first waffled; only hours later did he release a statement that he meant "political ideology"—exactly what Sharon wanted him to say.

Rubinstein also lied when he claimed that *Ha'aretz* journalist Baruch Kra had been warned not to publish information on the case. Kra contradicted him during the press conference, saying he had been in discussions with officials, and that Rubinstein had never issued a gag order, which would have been normal in a sensitive case.

The following day, attorneys for Glatt-Berkovich, released a statement saying, that their client had leaked the document on grounds of "the public's right to know," because she feared she would not be allowed to complete the investigation. She reportedly told interrogators, "I have a son who is about to be drafted into the Army," and her attorneys stressed that she feared the continuation of Sharon's brutal war against the Palestinians, which has also claimed 700 Israeli civilians' lives in two and a half years. "She was guided by a moral viewpoint and admits she broke the law," said attorney Yehoshua Reznik.

Commentator Amir Oren writing in *Ha'aretz* on Jan. 23, underscored that Glatt-Berkovich leaked the document and freely admitted it, because she justifiably feared, that the major investigation would have otherwise been blocked. Oren pointed out that Rubinstein had earlier refused to prosecute another Likud leader, former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the notorious "Bar-On Affair," despite a police recommendation for an indictment. Glatt-Berkovich's "decision," Oren wrote, "to pass judgment on herself, reflects internal mistrust in the system that Rubinstein heads. Had she believed that by encouraging Rubinstein, the law would have been forcefully applied to the Prime Minister, and he wouldn't have simply made do with a public report, she would not have had to decide to leak the document."

Also on Jan. 22, Israeli police were ordered to raid the offices of Haifa Mayor Amram Mitzna, seeking documents allegedly showing Mitzna taking bribes. This thoroughly "politically motivated" case stemmed from a bogus private complaint by ultra-right Likud activist Avia Visolly. In a statement issued by his office, Mitzna demanded the investigation be completed before the election, declaring, "Unlike another candidate for Prime Minister, Labor's candidate is not hiding



Washington is backing Ariel Sharon. But his attempts to preserve his re-election by arresting a prosecutor and hounding journalists who are exposing large-scale financial corruption scandals and investigations, evoked memories of Nixon's plumbers—or Ceausescu's Romania.

behind the right to remain silent, but is demanding the truth be exposed before the elections.”

Rumors are circulating that Sharon, who thinks every man has his price, has promised Rubinstein a seat on the Supreme Court in return for his cooperation.

The Banana Republic of Israel

Sharon's and Rubinstein's maneuvers were roundly denounced as a danger to democracy, and political leaders and civil rights organizations have called for Rubinstein to resign. Attorney Boaz Guttman, a former commander of the police fraud squad, told *Ha'aretz* on Jan. 22 that Rubinstein's move “sounds like a joke and a trick. In 20 years working in all types of investigations, I never heard of a journalist being questioned under such a warning [of police suspicions] because of a published report. It wasn't the obstruction that bothered the interrogators, but [that Kra refused] their demand that he name the sources. They tried to frighten him by waving a criminal record.”

The managing editor of *Ha'aretz*, Yoel Esteron, blasted the interrogation of Kra: “The Attorney General has thrown us into a reality that has been known only in other areas. People ask if there are precedents to this decision. Certainly there are precedents to this sort of investigation—in the Romania of Ceausescu, in the Soviet Union, there were certainly precedents like this. In a democracy, such a thing is inconceivable.”

Former Supreme Court President Moshe Landau also spoke out: “The police have enough activity under way these days other than to investigate a journalist about the leak of a

document that reached him. I am afraid this was a step meant to silence the press and get it used to working according to the instructions of the regime and not independently. This is another wild outcrop in Israeli society that we are witness to these days. To my regret many things have gone fundamentally wrong,” Landau said.

Prominent political scientist Yaron Ezrahi told Israeli radio: “This is not a banana republic—we are talking about the symptoms of a police state, which are beginning to trickle down into the system under the guise of safeguarding the law. I am not talking about the intentions of the Attorney General or his staff, but the results. The results are grave in the extreme.”

Ezrahi stressed that Rubinstein's request to have the Shin Bet domestic intelligence service investigate the leak to the press was denounced not only by the Supreme Court, but also by former Shin Bet chief Ami Ayalon, who called such a move an attempt to politicize his service. “Israel is a nation with a very thin democracy,” Ezrahi warned, “with a very backward and damaged layer of democratic norms, with large segments of the public who come from non-democratic nations. Therefore, the danger is very much greater here.” He warned that the apathy of the Israel public to this danger risks a collapse of the entire democratic system before people wake up to the dangers. “That is why the press fulfills a critical function today, throwing light on the acts and decisions that in fact threaten the rule of democracy in Israel. . . . No information is more vital to the public, than the possibility that the next Prime Minister of Israel would be forced to resign or be paralyzed due to a criminal investiga-

tion after the elections.”

Yedioth Ahronoth reporter Moshe Ronen also warned, “In the past there have been many attempts to restrict the flow of information. It’s clear that in the near term, sources in the police, army, prosecution, and other government agencies will be hesitant, waiting to see what happens to this prosecutor [Glatt-Berkovich], whether she’s brought to trial or not.” Expressing the hope that the truth will continue to be revealed, he said, “People of conscience, who have information and know of efforts to whitewash investigations or conceal information of importance to the public, will always be found.”

Shades of John Mitchell

A former senior state broadcasting official added, “Where Rubinstein is concerned, the respect for immunity is over. . . . What spooked the Justice Ministry, such that it had to issue a statement at 2 o’clock in the morning, to state that they’d discovered the source of the leak? Had they seized bin Laden?”

Washington has remained silent as Sharon tramples all legal norms in his bid to retain power. Using a nation’s judicial authorities to blatantly intimidate the free press and other, non-compliant judicial authorities, has always been defined as one of the first steps in the collapse of a democracy. What could motivate Rubinstein to become a John Mitchell? (The original Mitchell served several years in a U.S. Federal prison for debasing his office.)

Sharon is without doubt being given the strongest encouragement by the war party in Washington, who are in a full mobilization to get the United States into a new Middle East war. He is also receiving the backing of the so-called Mega Group of billionaires who exercise tremendous influence in both Washington and Israel. *EIR* revealed last week, and again in this issue, that Mega Group members Michael Steinhardt and Marc Rich were only recently in Israel meeting top political layers. Steinhardt is the major financial backer of Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), who leads the pro-Iraq war faction in the Democratic Party.

Steinhardt admitted to a Washington-based journalist that he was in Israel promoting the idea of a new national unity government between Likud and Labor, which is the only means of preserving Sharon and his war policy. Mitzna, however, is not playing along: He has roundly denounced the “national unity” policy as being suicidal for Israel. We also document how Steinhardt and Rich have been conspiring with elements within the Labor Party to undermine Mitzna’s determination to follow peace trail blazed by the martyred Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

First Indictments in Cash-for-Votes

Although the Likud candidates are slated to win the election, some of the winners may go from their Knesset (parliament) seats to prison cells. The investigation into the massive

illegalities in the Likud’s Central Committee and its election of the Likud Knesset candidates, has begun to yield criminal indictments. In the “cash for votes” investigation, three lower-level Likudniks were arrested on various charges, including soliciting money from potential candidates in return for Central Committee members’ votes to position them high on the slate. Those indicted were Haim Naim, of the Likud Central Committee; Yaacov Baranes, deputy chairman of the Netanya Religious Council; and Rivka Cohen, the head of the neighborhood committee of Kfar Shalem, in Tel Aviv.

Naim is accused of asking candidate Akiva Nof for money in return for 45 votes. Baranes is accused of approaching candidate Nahman Shechter, who vied for a seat against Ariel Sharon’s son Omri, demanding payment in the form of office expenses for a local campaign he was running, in return for his support along with 30-40 other Central Committee members. Shechter refused to pay; it is not known whether Omri Sharon paid. Cohen is accused of impersonating another Central Committee member when she made a phone call to request payments from candidate Gideon Saar. Saar had apparently promised the Central Committee member cash in return for votes. Although Saar is not accused of anything yet, it is important to note that he is Sharon’s former Cabinet secretary. More indictments are expected, including that of former deputy infrastructure minister Naomi Blumenthal, number 12 on the Likud’s Knesset list.

However, more damaging is the investigation into how the top Israeli mafia bosses became Likud Central Committee members, and their role in electing the list of the party’s Knesset candidates. This part of the investigation involves Omri Sharon, who organized the Likud recruitment drive which brought Israel’s top mafia bosses onto the Central Committee.

Meanwhile the investigation into the illegal \$1.5 million loan, which is at the center of Sharon’s mad cover-up, continues. In the latest development, the Anglo-South African businessman Cyril Kern, who made the loan, has released to the press an affidavit he wrote for the South African government. Sounding as if it were written by Sharon’s spin-doctors, the affidavit claims that Kern gave the loan to Sharon’s son, Gilad—who he claims refers to him as “uncle Cyril”—for the latter’s personal needs. Kern then denounces the Labor Party for using him “in an undemocratic attempt to influence the Israeli elections.”

Mysteriously, Kern’s affidavit did not say whether the money he lent, which is the subject of the criminal investigation, was his; he does say that it was sent from “a foreign trust.” *EIR*’s investigation revealed that Kern left Great Britain as a bankrupt after two of his businesses went into receivership.

If Sharon does win the elections on Jan. 28, there is a question whether these criminal investigations, the most serious in Israel’s history, will be carried through; or, will Sharon turn Israel into a parody of Ceausescu’s Romania?