

Israeli crisis deepens

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In his bid to form a coalition government, Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of the right-wing Likud Party, has signed an agreement with the far-right Yisrael Beiteinu party that will give it five cabinet posts. Party leader Avigdor Lieberman is to become Israel's foreign secretary.

Likud won 27 seats in the elections in February, one less than Kadima. But Netanyahu was asked to form a government because the rightist parties together have 65 seats in the 120-member Knesset.

It will need further political horse trading to bring the smaller right-wing parties, Shas, Jewish Home and United Torah Judaism, on board. But if Netanyahu succeeds, then his will be the most right-wing government in Israel's history—beholden to parties based on the Jewish settlers in the Occupied Territories and with a racist advocate of ethnic cleansing as its international representative.

Lieberman is a vociferous supporter of "transferring" Israeli Arabs, whom he views as a fifth column, to the Palestinian territories. He is opposed to the concept of "land for peace" on which the supposed "two state" solution is based. Ten years ago, he called for Egypt's Aswan High Dam to be bombed and Egypt to be flooded. More recently, he demanded the obliteration of Hamas in terms that suggested the use of nuclear weapons against Gaza, and has advocated the bombing of Iran. A thoroughly corrupt politician, he is under investigation for tax evasion, fraud and money laundering.

To this point, Kadima and Labour have refused to consider a coalition. But Netanyahu's agreement with Yisrael Beiteinu leaves the door open for Tzipi Livni of Kadima to retain her post as foreign minister if she decided to join the coalition.

Nevertheless, the naming of such a provocateur and warmonger as a potential foreign secretary signifies a further stage in the political and social degeneration of

Zionism. His rise to prominence represents the culmination of a lurch to the right along the entire spectrum of official Israeli politics.

The bedrock of Lieberman's support is Israel's 1.25 million Russian Jews and he started his political life as a young man in Rabbi Meir Kahane's Kach party, which was banned in the 1980s for its violence and racism. But his subsequent career has been at the centre of official political life. He served as secretary of the Jerusalem branch of the Histadrut trade union federation, before moving on to Likud, acting as its director-general from 1993 to 1996 and head of the office of then Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for a year afterwards.

He founded and became head of Yisrael Beiteinu in 1999, a party that initially represented secular Jews from Russia before attracting a wider constituency, and entered the Knesset in 1999. He served in Ariel Sharon's governments until he was sacked in 2004 for opposing Sharon's withdrawal of the Jewish settlements from Gaza. He then joined Ehud Olmert's Kadima government as one of several deputy prime ministers and Minister of Strategic Affairs in October 2006, but resigned in January 2008 after refusing to support peace talks with the Palestinians under the US-backed Annapolis process. His party won 15 seats in the recent elections, pushing Labour, the party which founded the state of Israel, into fourth place.

Lieberman's hard-line stance against the Palestinians and Israeli Arabs is, moreover, not the aberration which Israel's apologists claim. In reality he could only be considered for the post of foreign secretary because of the degree to which his policies have become mainstream within Israel's ruling circles.

His rise to the highest echelons of government was prepared by Israel's murderous assaults, first on Lebanon and Gaza in 2006, and then again on Gaza this year. This last assault, which claimed the lives of over

1,300 men, women and children, was instigated by Kadima and Labour, the very parties now held up as a force for moderation in an otherwise extreme right government. In addition, both Netanyahu and Livni have lent tacit support to his demand that the Arab population must take loyalty oaths to Israel or face mass expulsion.

Israel, which the Zionists claimed would provide a safe haven for the Jews, free from social discrimination, injustice and oppression, is riven with social and political tensions. It illegally occupies and oppresses the Palestinians and has created a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. Discrimination against Israeli Arabs is only the most naked expression of grotesque levels of social inequality and related tensions that are tearing Israel apart. Over 1.6 million Israelis out of seven million live in poverty, including 800,000 children—one in three. The working poor make up nearly 45 percent of the working population, while the number of Israeli millionaires per capita is twice the world average.

Lieberman has successfully exploited these social and political divisions—amongst Russian Jews and a layer of youth—based on demagogic calls for a program of public works to tackle unemployment combined with anti-Arab racism.

There is an unmistakable echo in this loathsome political platform of the political ideology utilized by Hitler and the Nazis to come to power in Germany 75 years ago. That such a figure could be selected as Israel's face to the world is the most damning indictment of the entire Zionist project.

Lieberman is in reality the inevitable product of a state founded on the dispossession of another people and maintained ever since through war, repression, systematic discrimination and the imposition of grotesque levels of social inequality on the majority of its people. He has followed in the footsteps of right-wing thugs like Netanyahu and war criminals like Ariel Sharon.

The prospective foreign minister is the personal embodiment of the dead end into which Zionism has led the Israeli people—a dead end that can only be overcome by securing the political unity of Arab and Jewish workers in a common struggle against capitalism and for the building of a socialist society throughout the Middle East.

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