

Micah Morrison

UNITY IN WEAKNESS: ISRAEL ENTERS A NEW ERA

The strange and mysterious ways of democracy.

Rotation, or *rotatzia* in the Hebrew derivative, is the new *bon mot* of Israeli politics. Labor party leader Shimon Peres and Likud chief Yitzhak Shamir will rotate the premiership under the recently concluded agreement for a national unity government. The unity agreement rotates on an elaborate Labor-Likud formula designed to paper over differences on peace and security issues. The myriad small parties which held the balance of power in practically every government for the past thirty-six years have for the time being been rotated out of office. And the ideological godfathers of the two main currents of Zionism—Labor's David Ben-Gurion and the Likud's Vladimir Jabotinsky—are probably rotating in their graves at the spectacle of the two major parties sharing power in a massive twenty-five seat cabinet.

Israeli politics may never be the same. The results of the July 23 Knesset (parliament) elections and the lengthy coalition negotiations that followed it have reshaped the political map. The socialist Labor Alignment has split, with its left wing—the Mapam party, the Citizens' Rights Movement, and Labor superdove Yossi Sarid—going into the opposition. The conservative Likud has lost some of its right-wing partners, most notably the Tehiya (Renewal) party, which advocates the quick annexation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. New parties are on the scene, new alliances are forming. The powerful camp of religious voters is splintered and in disarray. On the extreme Left, two parties which receive the tacit backing of the PLO gained six seats in the 120-member unicameral parliament. On the extreme right, the rabidly racist rabbi from Brooklyn, Meir Kahane, can now be found frothing from a back bench in the Knesset.

Micah Morrison is a free-lance writer based in Jerusalem.

How did this odd turn of affairs come about? An examination of the six-month electoral wrangle that led to the formation of a national unity government may help explain how all of these strange fellows came to share the same political bed, and may help illustrate the nature and pitfalls of Israeli democracy, the life expectancy of the new government, and the problems Israel faces in the immediate future.

Our story begins with the Tami (Israeli Heritage) party of Mr. Aharon Abuhatzzeira. Tami is the paradigmatic small party in Israeli politics. Created a month before the 1981 Knesset elections when Mr. Abuhatzzeira broke from the National Religious party (itself a major broker in the constellation of small party powers), Tami claimed to represent the interests of Israel's Sephardim, Jews of North African and Middle Eastern ancestry. To many in Israel at the time it appeared that Mr. Abuhatzzeira was capitalizing on a period of social tension between Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews. Ashkenazim are Jews of East

European and Western origin, and generally are the better educated and wealthier members of Israeli society. Mr. Abuhatzzeira's ethnically based electoral pitch met with some success in 1981, and Tami entered the Likud with three Knesset seats, giving the Likud a slim coalition majority but placing the government at Mr. Abuhatzzeira's mercy. Without Tami, the Likud did not have the Knesset muscle necessary to govern, yet Tami's unceasing efforts to feather its own nest with increased budgets had the coalition on the brink of collapse on several occasions.

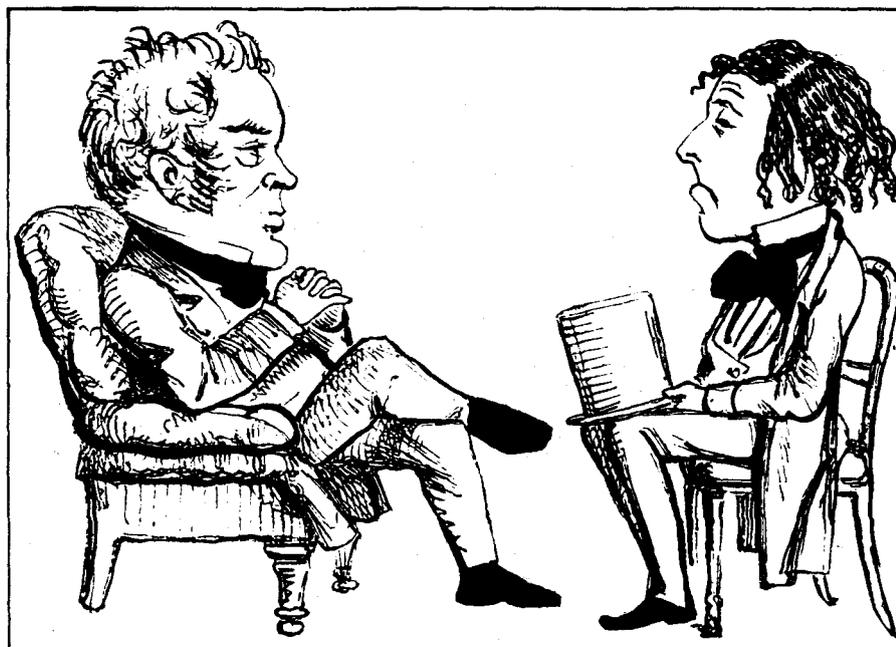
By early 1984, Tami strategists estimated that the party's strength would soon begin to decline in the face of stiff anti-inflation measures being pushed by the Likud. The Finance Ministry was attempting to slow inflation and trim the foreign debt by reducing ministerial budgets and cutting back on the heavy subsidies on food and fuel. The budget reductions threatened to bite into Tami's pocketbook, and the three-man faction opposed them.

In March, the then-intact Labor Alignment declared its intention to

table an early elections motion. Labor argued that the country was being ripped apart by fast-running inflation (some 200 percent in March, more than 400 percent annually by mid-September), sapped by a \$20 billion foreign debt, and morally drained by the ongoing conflict in Lebanon and the Likud's policy of increased West Bank settlement. The Likud, however, could at the time point to a relatively low level of unemployment, a continuing slow rise in the standard of living despite inflation, and a healthy degree of public support for its West Bank program. So Prime Minister Shamir and his Likud colleagues were not overly perturbed when they heard Labor's declaration to move for early elections. Only a few days before, Mr. Abuhatzzeira had assured his partners in government that he would stay in the coalition. Labor could muster only fifty-six opposition votes; it needed at least five more to pass the motion, and all Likud coalition members seemed firmly in hand. But something was rotten in the coalition, and by the time Likud realized the bad smell was coming from Mr. Abuhatzzeira it was too late.

On March 22, Mr. Abuhatzzeira threw the political world into turmoil when he announced he would vote for Labor on the early elections motion. Feeling the budget pinch and calculating he could go into the next Knesset with more power, he used his three votes and those of two other Likud mavericks to bring down the government. But when the election results came rolling in late in the night of July 23 it was clear that Mr. Abuhatzzeira had made a devastatingly bad move, a move that raised questions about his own political future, and about the efficient functioning of Israeli democracy.

Although modern Israel is only thirty-six years old, its parliament



takes its name from the "Knesset HaGedolah," the Great Assembly convened by the Jewish sages Ezra and Nehemiah some 2,500 years ago. Yet even with all their wisdom Ezra and Nehemiah probably never foresaw the rambunctious and factional nature of the democratic process in present-day Israel.

Sixty-five organizations requested application forms to run in the 1984

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elections. Of the sixty-five, twenty-six parties gathered the minimum 2,500 signatures of eligible voters and qualified for the July race. A veritable feast of factions, sure to give indigestion to even the most seasoned political gourmet: the Likud, Labor, former Likud defense minister Ezer Weizman's Yahad (Together) party, no less than four religious parties, the Communist Democratic Front, a radical Arab-Jewish list, two dovish civil rights groups, the Organization of Disabled Israelis, the National Organization for Tenants' Protection, the Movement for the Abolition of Income Tax, the Independent Indian Immigrants, and the Young People's party. The racist vote was represented by the Kach (Thus) party of Israel's Louis Farrakhan, Rabbi Meir Kahane, who advocates the expulsion of all Arabs from Israel, laws forbidding sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews, and a theocratic state in place of a democratic one; the West Bank settlement movement had the Tehiya party; and Sephardi Jews with an ethnic yen could cast their ballot for Tami, or, if they were very religious, they could vote for the ultra-Orthodox Shas (Sephardi Tora Guardian) party. For voters who couldn't bring themselves to choose any of the above there were a number of individuals running on suitably quixotic platforms, including former Likud finance minister Yigal Hurvitz, who called his party "Courage to Cure the Economy," and former Likud minister-without-portfolio Mordechai Ben-Porat, one of the two coalition mavericks who helped bring the government down in March.

Politicians went on the stump throughout Israel, and a cry of protest by columnists and editorialists was heard throughout the land, lamenting the "Americanization" of the country's parliamentary campaigns. The names, slogans, and occasionally even the positions of the parties appeared in a seemingly endless stream of mini-newspapers, flyers, pamphlets, posters, bumper stickers, stick-on but-

tons, T-shirts, and paper eyeshades to keep away the blinding summer sun. Advertising agencies groomed the images of party and candidate and presented them to the public in peppy radio jingles and slickly edited television commercials.

The television ads were the particular bane of the editorialists. "In adopting this American art form," chided the *Jerusalem Post*, "Israel's

parties have gone beyond the model. For in the U.S. each party wages its own campaign, as if they were selling their own beer. In Israel, the parties respond to each other's ads, establishing a dialogue of inanities." Both the Likud and Labor were using highly paid comedians to drive home election points, and the gray eminences at the *Post* ended the editorial with the hope that, after the election, "the remaining men of reason in our major parties [will] review the practice of reducing the challenges facing our nation to a matter of jingles, powder and make-up."

But for all its sound and fury the 1984 campaign did not come close to the explosive levels of 1981, when eggs and tomatoes were thrown at Labor leader Shimon Peres and near-violent confrontations between Likud and Labor supporters marred many campaign events. This time, the major parties kept the gloves on. Local pundits linked the milder tone to the absence of former prime minister Menachem Begin, in seclusion since his retirement in August 1983, and to the reduced role of former defense minister Ariel Sharon.

With the election a few weeks away, 1984 was shaping up as a bread and butter campaign. Labor, intent on keeping the campaign low-key, focused on the economy and pushed its dovish wing out of the spotlight. Both the Likud and Labor were aiming for voters at Israel's political center. Labor's television ads sharply illustrated the effects of inflation by quoting the accelerating prices of staple domestic items throughout the seven years of Likud rule, reminding viewers of promises made and broken by a series of Likud finance ministers, and presenting angry man-in-the-street interviews with former Likud supporters. The Likud dealt with the economic issue by stressing the improved standard of living, better conditions in the poor neighborhoods and development towns, and increased spending on social welfare.

Beyond the slogans and ads, not a

great deal of practical political distance separated the two major parties. Israelis realized that—no matter which party or parties came to power after July 23—stringent economic austerity measures would have to come soon. On the West Bank issue, and on security in general, Labor was perceived as the more dovish. It expressed a willingness to negotiate a peace treaty with Jordan on the basis of territorial compromise, pledged not to dismantle any West Bank settlements, and not to build any new settlements near Arab urban centers. The Likud mounted a strong defense of its settlement program and emphasized that increased West Bank settlement "prevents the establishment of a PLO state." Lebanon was a frozen issue. Labor, playing it safe, did not energetically challenge the Likud about the goals and price of the war. Both parties said they wanted to get out of southern Lebanon as soon as possible, but that a quick withdrawal would bring chaos to the area and a return of the PLO to Israel's northern border.

As election day drew closer Israelis began to play the numbers game in earnest. Everywhere one went, people were arguing the relative merits of this or that party, and its chances for forming a coalition. Labor thought it would win fifty of its own Knesset seats and be able to form a strong government with the two civil rights groups—the Shinui (Change) party and the Citizens' Rights Movement—and with the possible addition of Ezer Weizman's Yahad party. Yahad, created a few months before the election, was predicted to make a very good small party showing, with five to seven seats forecasted in the early polls. The Likud was counting on a coalition with the religious parties, the Tehiya settlement party, and possibly with Yahad. Sixty-one is the magic number in Israeli politics, and both major parties approached the day of decision with wary

confidence, insisting that they would be able to put together the sixty-one seats necessary for a Knesset majority.

If there were an Olympics for politics, Israel would be a safe bet to win the gold. Voter participation is the highest in the world, running at an average of 80 percent, and political training starts at a very young age. "I'm for Labor," said one precocious eight-year-old. "The prices at the candy shop have gone way too high." This little girl went on to give a fairly accurate estimate of the chances for a Labor-led coalition. On the streets, half-naked urchins handled much of the distribution of pamphlets and flyers. And many of the parties made use of the little darlings in television ads, where the child stars of tomorrow smiled fetchingly while a voice-over warned of doom if the opposition came to power.

But on July 23 it was time for the grown-ups. Election day is a national holiday and many Israelis took advantage of it by voting early in the morning or late in the evening and spending the interim at the beach or picnicking in the park. The Central Election Committee paid the bus and plane fares for people who wanted to travel to their home polling stations, the only place an Israeli civilian is allowed to vote. In the military hospitals, soldiers moved among the wounded with voting boxes. In southern Lebanon, portable polling facilities were carried to every army outpost. At civilian hospitals the sick were provided with ambulance transport; and in centers for the elderly, buses were hired to take the residents home for a one-day voting vacation.

By noon, 17 percent of the electorate had voted. Israel Radio reported calm and order at most of the country's polling stations. A woman, naked to the waist, with political stickers pasted



on her breasts, was spotted walking through the Galilee town of Tiberias. (There were conflicting reports as to whether the stickers were Likud or Labor.) At a Beduin Arab village, an arrangement was made for two feuding tribes to vote at the area's sole polling station without killing each other; one tribe voted in the morning, the other in the evening. In Jerusalem's religious Bayit Vagan neighborhood, residents protested about the election officials' immodest dress and refused to vote until the officials went home and changed. And in the ultra-Orthodox Mea Sharim neighborhood the issue was not who to vote for, but whether to vote at all. Some ultra-Orthodox Jews oppose the state of Israel, which they say cannot be formed until the Messiah comes. These people were offering citizens a hundred dollars not to vote. One simply had to deposit one's identity card (necessary for voting) and pick it up the next day. Where did the pay-off money come from? a reporter asked. From religious Jews in America, came the reply.

By three o'clock 40 percent of the vote was in, by six o'clock 54 percent, and by the time the polls closed at ten o'clock 78.5 percent of the Israeli people had voted. There were several incidents of angry voters tearing up the polling slips of parties they didn't like, political posters had been ripped down in Mea Sharim, and in a few Arab towns and cities there were reports of Communists intimidating voters, but in general the election process had proceeded smoothly, much to the relief of election officials. That was the good news. At 2:00 a.m., when most of the results were in, came the bad news: Nobody won.

Fifteen parties won seats in the Knesset. The Likud won forty-one seats, Labor forty-four. Israeli law directs the President, whose office is largely symbolic, to invite the party with the best chance of forming a government to try and do so. But neither of the major parties could tell President Chaim Herzog that they had sixty-one votes. Once again, it seemed that Israel's future was placed in the hands of the diverse and ideologically divided small parties. Of these, the West Bank settlement party, Tehiya, did best, winning five seats, up two from 1981. The Communist Democratic Front, the National Religious party, and the Sephardi Orthodox Shas party each won four seats. The other two religious parties, the ultra-Orthodox Aguda Israel and the hawkish Morasha party, each won two seats. Ezer Weizman's Yahad party was disappointed with only a three-seat

win. On the moderate left, Shinui and the Citizens' Rights Movement each won three seats. The Arab-Jewish party—the Progressive List for Peace—won two seats. Tami, which played a key role in bringing down the government in March, was rewarded for its treachery with a two-seat reduction, from three seats to one. The Likud's former finance minister, Yigal "Courage to Cure the Economy" Hurvitz, won one seat and, in the most disturbing result of the election, Rabbi Kahane's xenophobic Kach party slipped into the Knesset with a single seat.

The situation grew fiendishly com-

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plex as parties large and small rushed into consultations, trying to sew up a coalition. At the outset of the consultations, the Labor Alignment, with its allies in the Shinui party and the Citizens' Rights Movement, could count on fifty votes. The Likud, with Tehiya and Morasha firmly in their camp, had forty-eight votes. Several parties were effectively disqualified from playing a major role in coalition-building right away: the radicals on the left—the Democratic Front and the Progressive List—could be counted on to vote against the Likud, but Labor would not enter into a coalition with them because of their support of the PLO and a Palestinian state on the West Bank. Rabbi Khomeini—er, Kahane—whose disgusting diatribes have repelled the Israeli public for more than a decade, would certainly vote against Labor, but the Likud refused to let him near their attempts at building a coalition. That left Yahad (three votes), the three uncommitted religious factions (ten votes split between three parties), and the single votes of Abuhateira and Hurvitz in pivotal positions, if one of the two main parties were to build a narrow-based coalition majority.

Labor, expecting victory, was stunned by the election results. Many in the Likud, on the other hand, were not badly disappointed; they had feared a major defeat in the first election without the leadership of Menachem Begin. Yet rather quickly it became apparent to Labor and Likud leaders that putting together a narrow-based coalition was not going to be easy. A week passed with no progress. Then another week. Public

demands for a national unity government grew stronger. Rabbi Kahane's antics and the deadlocked situation brought calls for electoral reform. Rabbi Kahane declared that he would turn the Knesset into a stage for his views and "drive the country crazy." On a "victory march" through the Old City of Jerusalem, Kahane and his followers harassed Arab shopkeepers and shouted "Arabs out of Israel!" Dovish groups countered with a march of their own, handing out leaflets saying that Israel wanted to live in peace with the Arabs. Speaking a few days after the election, the mad rabbi made his views "clear." "A democratic

Jewish state is a contradiction in terms," he said at Jerusalem's Beit Agron press center. "Why? Because the Arabs will have babies and shift the balance of power. Arabs have many, many babies. Tel Aviv has many, many dogs."

By the end of the second week following the elections, with Kahane capturing world headlines, the economy continuing to deteriorate, Israeli soldiers dying in Lebanon, and still no government, President Herzog asked Shimon Peres—as leader of the party that had gained the most votes—to try and form a government. He urged Mr. Peres to seek the broadest possible coalition. "I sense that the bulk of the people want a strong and stable government," President Herzog said, emphasizing the need for national unity.

Peres, given a maximum of forty-two days to form a government, launched a two-front effort, wooing the small parties toward a narrow-based coalition on one front while opening negotiations with Prime Minister Shamir and the Likud on the other. Over the next five weeks, in a series of power-plays and to-the-brink maneuvers, Peres showed himself to be a consummately cunning and patient politician. In mid-August the Labor-Likud national unity talks stalled over disagreements about the West Bank and negotiations with Jordan. The Likud insisted that an active policy of West Bank settlement continue, and that negotiations with Jordan be solely on the basis of the Camp David Agreements, which speak of a transitional autonomy period for the Arabs of the area. Labor wanted to restrain

settlement in certain areas and enter into peace talks with Jordan "without preconditions." With the talks foundering, national unity seemed far away. Mr. Peres turned his energies toward the other parties.

A few days later, he pulled a rabbit out of his hat. Ezer Weizman (three votes) and Yigal Hurvitz (one vote) announced they would not join a Likud-led government. By the end of the week a Peres-Weizman-Hurvitz agreement was signed. This small party shift of positions pushed the Likud back into national unity talks—without Weizman, the Likud had no chance of forming a narrow coalition. Peres pushed ahead with his two-front campaign. Although he hoped the "domino effect" would bring the religious parties into his camp on the heels of the Weizman-Hurvitz agreement, this did not come to pass. The religious factions were at odds with each other, and they were holding out for a better deal: more ministerial posts, a fat slice of power, and an amendment to the controversial "Who is a Jew" law. The amendment, long demanded by the religious parties, would recognize as converts to Judaism only those who converted according to Orthodox Jewish law. It is strongly opposed by religious and secular moderates in Israel and by Conservative and Reform Jews throughout the world.

Meanwhile, as consultations with the religious parties and negotiations between Labor and the Likud continued, Tami leader Aharon Abuhateira was being energetically courted by Labor. The single vote of the man who created the whole mess back in March once again seemed pivotal. With Tami, it was thought, perhaps the balance would be tipped to Labor and one or more of the religious parties would follow Abuhateira into a coalition, putting Labor over the top. But by September 1 Tami and the religious parties were still sitting on the fence, and time was running out for Mr. Peres. Hope for a narrow coalition was almost exhausted, and two options existed: new elections, or national unity. Peres and Shamir, both facing strong challenges within their own parties and not likely to survive the internal battles which would precede a new election, stopped skirmishing and got down to hard bargaining. Within two weeks a national unity agreement was hammered out, and a new era in Israeli politics began.

The arts of parliamentary improvisation and accommodation underlie the fifty-month national unity agreement. In what is surely one of the most

unusual arrangements in contemporary politics, Peres and Shamir agreed to rotate the premiership in two twenty-five month cycles. Peres serves as prime minister and Shamir as vice prime minister and foreign minister for the first cycle, and their roles are reversed for the second. Labor's Yitzhak Rabin will hold the Defense portfolio for the entire period. Yitzhak Moda'i of the Liberal faction of the Likud has stepped into the hottest seat in Israeli politics, the Finance Ministry. In addition to the rotating deputy prime minister's slot, there are two other vice premiers, David Levy of the Likud and popular former president Yitzhak Navon of Labor, both men rising stars in their respective parties. Both also hold influential Cabinet portfolios: Navon the Ministry of Education and Culture, Levy the Ministry of Housing and Construction.

The Cabinet has been expanded to twenty-five posts in order to accommodate representatives of every important faction in the Likud and Labor and many of their small party allies. Although the Labor-Likud bloc was more than enough to guarantee a Knesset majority, both major parties wanted the government to have as broad a base as possible. Also, the big parties want to maintain good relations with the small parties in case the government falls and a narrow coalition should again be in the cards. And of course every seasoned politician and coalition-juggler is keeping his eye on 1988 and the next election. Thus, the national unity government includes Labor, the Likud, Weizman's Yahad party, Yigal Hurvitz, the four religious parties, and Shinui. (Mr. Abuhateira of Tami played hard-to-get just a little too long and was left out in the cold.) Cabinet portfolios have been divided equally between Labor and Likud supporters, the twenty-fifth post going to the uncommitted Dr. Yosef Burg of the National Religious party.

Since government by a herd of twenty-five potential prime ministers might prove nearly impossible, the unity accord provides for an "inner cabinet" of ten top ministers, five from Labor and five from the Likud. The decisions of the inner cabinet, the accord states, "will be binding on the whole government." The agreement also calls for the establishment of ministerial committees on economics and electoral reform. In addition to the Cabinet, the inner cabinet, and the ministerial committees, it is rumored that Prime Minister Peres has revived Golda Meir's practice of holding a "kitchen cabinet" meeting of ideological allies on Saturday nights, prior to the regular Cabinet meeting on Sundays.

On the controversial issues of West Bank settlement and peace negotiations with Jordan, the accord has something for everybody. To satisfy the Likud on the negotiations issue, clause nine of the Basic Policy Guidelines section of the accord states that "the Government will work to continue the peace process in keeping with the framework for peace in the Middle East that was agreed upon at Camp David, and to resume negotiations and to give full autonomy to the Arab residents" of the West Bank and Gaza. To satisfy Labor, clause ten states that "Israel will call on Jordan to begin peace negotiations, in order to turn over a new leaf in the region. . . ." One clause fits the Likud's view, the other Labor's. On settlements, the pace of settlement will be slowed in line with general economic austerity measures, but "five to six settlements will be established within a year." Another sub-clause states that "the establishment of new settlements will be decided by a majority of the ministers." Given the ministerial parity, it is likely that battles will erupt over the establishment of settlements near Arab urban centers and—if they sense the time is right—one of the major parties may bolt the coalition over the issue. Another potentially divisive issue could be a Jordanian or PLO gesture toward Labor's position of territorial compromise on the West Bank, though in light of the current situation in the Arab world this is unlikely.

On Lebanon, the agreement states that a "withdrawal from Lebanon, within a short period of time, [is] to be fixed by the government," once security agreements for the north are assured. The new government has backed down from the demand for a simultaneous withdrawal of Syrian and Israeli forces, and they now speak more positively about a United Nations role in the area. If U.N. forces and the Israeli-backed South Lebanese Army are patrolling the Lebanese side of the northern border, the Israel Defense Forces may pull back. Jerusalem is cautiously optimistic about a speedy withdrawal—and on the need to get out of Lebanon, there seems to be genuine national unity.

But there is a good deal less optimism about the national unity government's greatest challenge—the economy. In the public's perception, the economic challenge has not been met with clarity and vigor. At this time of writing, after three weeks of national unity government and months of debate on economic measures, Prime Minister Peres and his mega-Cabinet have yet to come up with a clear plan to combat Israel's worsening financial plight. The unity guidelines state that

"the socio-economic policy will work to a) reduce the country's economic dependence by reducing the balance of payments deficit, increasing exports, and reducing imports; b) stabilize the economy by checking inflation; c) renew economic growth while maintaining full employment; d) change the structure of the economy by enlarging and strengthening the export and productive sectors, and reducing the proportion of public and administrative services."

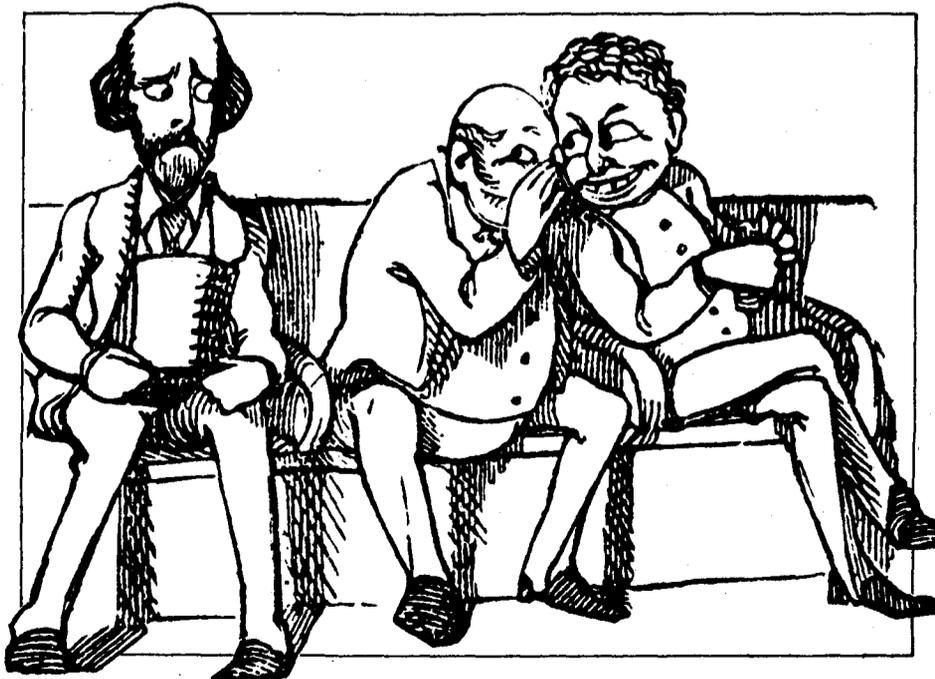
The government plans to achieve these goals by reducing civilian and defense expenditures, curbing private consumption, reaching an agreement on a wage and price freeze with the monolithic Histadrut labor federation, encouraging savings and industrial development, particularly in high-tech fields, and reforming the tax system while at the same time broadening tax collection. Clearly, there are contradictions here. Many economists say the country cannot be put back on a firm footing without increasing unemployment, and indeed the latest forecasts show unemployment rising fast. The Histadrut has balked at negotiating a wage and price deal, and Treasury officials are now conceding that inflation will speed up in the coming months. Some economists are predicting a period of stagflation.

Although they have not presented a coherent economic plan, Prime Minister Peres and his economic team have introduced a number of stop-gap measures: The shekel was devalued by nine percent, taxes raised, subsidies on food and fuel cut, a six-month ban on the import of luxury items imposed, foreign currency restrictions increased, and a decision was taken to slash one billion dollars from the budget. (Ironically, the issue of budget and subsidy cuts were the factors that precipitated Tami's move to bring down the previous government in March.) President Reagan's pledge on

October 9 to back up Israel's credit-rating on the international market, as well as the congressional release of \$1.2 billion in economic aid in one lump sum, are certainly welcome measures, but they will do little to help reach the economic goals stated in the national unity accord.

Economics aside, several conclusions may be drawn from the elections. First, the need for electoral reform is pressing. At present a candidate needs only one percent of the vote (in 1984, about 20,000 votes) to qualify for a Knesset seat. This low threshold has resulted in a proliferation of small parties, and small parties can gain a stranglehold on government, as we have seen in the case of the Tami party. Dangerous extremists like Kahane, or simply unscrupulous characters like Aharon Abuhateira, can exercise power far beyond their mandate. Second, although there was a slight overall shift to the right in the election, the results reflect an increasing polarization in Israeli society, with gaps widening in attitudes toward the Arabs, the West Bank issue, and religious and secular lifestyles. Extremist groups are staking claims further and further out on the fringes of society. If the economic situation continues to deteriorate and Israel's social fabric—stretched thin at times between Jewish-Arab, Ashkenazi-Sephardi, and religious-secular tensions—begins to rip apart, extremist groups such as Kahane's on the right may increase their strength and bring chaos to the land.

For the Likud, the 1984 elections proved there is life after Menachem Begin, who exercised complete control over the Herut party (the main component of the Likud) during its twenty-nine years in the political wilderness and its first six years in power. Nineteen eighty-four also



saw the beginning of the political rehabilitation of Ariel Sharon, who, banished to the hinterlands of ministerial responsibility after being found to bear some indirect responsibility for the massacres at the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps, now holds the influential Industry and Trade portfolio in the Cabinet and is a rising force in the Likud. Sharon, together with Finance Minister Moda'i and Deputy Prime Minister Levy, will shape the Likud of the future.

For Labor, 1984 saw the break-up of its historic partnership with the left-wing Mapam party. After seven years

out of power, Labor under Peres now has the opportunity to regain the trust (and votes) of many Israelis who distrusted Labor's drift to the left when it was aligned with Mapam. And having patched over old differences, Labor's Big Three—Peres, Defense Minister Rabin, and Deputy Prime Minister Navon—are moving the party into a new era of shared rule.

Finally, from an American point of view, the elections demonstrated both the vitality and the fragility of Israel's democratic system. Although the new government is for the moment intact, there is some worried speculation in Jerusalem about U.S. pressure on

Israel to make concessions in the West Bank following the American election. A forced change in the unity government's carefully charted agreement on the West Bank and Jordan could quickly bring the government down. And perhaps one lesson of democracy is that the few free nations of the world should be allowed a freedom of choice without external pressure, especially in matters central to their security. Israel needs America standing by its side in order to fend off the unremitting hostility of the Arab nations, much of the Third World, the Soviet Union, and their vapid clones at the United Nations. It needs American financial

backing to help set its economy back on course and to help keep pace with a rapid, mainly Russian-provided arms build-up in the Arab world, and it needs the world's greatest democracy standing firm with one of the world's smallest and most troubled democracies. The West Bank and the fate of the Palestinians living under Israeli administration is a tortuously complicated issue, combining the moral dilemma of the Arab role in a Jewish state with the strategic reality of Israel's vulnerability. With this in mind, it is best that Israel be allowed the freedom to choose its own course. □



BOOKS FOR CHRISTMAS

A book lover's guide for the Holiday Season.



ELLIOTT ABRAMS

For those seeking to understand the Third World, and who also enjoy marvelous writing, turn immediately to V.S. Naipaul. His novel *A Bend in the River* (1979) is arguably the best thing ever written about development and underdevelopment, and should be required reading for every employee of the Agency for International Development.

Two recent books illuminate American politics. The first, the now famous Collier and Horowitz book, *The Kennedys* (Summit Books, \$20.95), is for one thing a very good read. The second, Ben Wattenberg's *The Good News is the Bad News is Wrong* (Simon and Schuster, \$17.95), is Wattenberg's analysis of the statistical data which emerge from the 1980 census. The picture that comes forth is a country whose politics may be in trouble but whose people are doing better and better. We learn a great deal from these two books about the fundamental health and progress of American society, while simultaneously that society is being attacked by an elite which too often does not share in or admire its virtues. Give them to a favorite friend as a matched set.

A final suggestion for history buffs is Lord Kinross's study of the Turkish Empire, called *The Ottoman Centuries*

(1977). It is beautifully written, and it tells us about an area of the world that tends to get lost behind our Eurocentrism and our newfound interest in the Arab world.

Elliott Abrams is Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs.

KENNETH L. ADELMAN

The Devil Drives (1967). Every year merits another biography, so full were Sir Richard Burton's experiences in Africa and elsewhere. Fawn Brodie packs in all this and makes it so enthralling. The book shows what one man with drive and curiosity can do. He absorbed life, and we are the beneficiaries of his amazing absorption.

Hamlet. Believe me, after seeing or reading it annually and teaching it for several years, I find there is a new nugget each time you experience the work. How could Hamlet be such a magnificent human being, yet so flawed in judging people—not just Claudius, but particularly himself?

Lincoln (Random House, \$19.95). This seemingly awkward bumbler astonished us all. Gore Vidal shares this astonishment and shows gloriously that in the depths of the Civil War, all we had was his will.

Likewise for Churchill (*The Last*

Lion, 1983) in the depths of World War II, as William Manchester proves most brilliantly. One saw Churchill's flaws in the first five minutes, and then spent a lifetime learning his virtues. Earlier biographies (Morgan, Gilbert) furnish endless enrichment of those virtues.

Charles XII (1895). A peaceful, sensitive, kind man—"a sweet, lovely rose"—who spent his entire reign somehow in the saddle waging bloody war. He proved a king most royal, who deserved a longer life and better times, but remains at the core both wondrous and mysterious, as Robert Bain heroically portrays.

Kenneth L. Adelman is director of the United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

WICK ALLISON

The Times Are Never So Bad, by André Dubus (1983), contains the most powerful short story I've ever read. "A Father's Story" ripples along until—wham—Dubus plants a fist in your stomach. The man is an artist and his artistry is in his punch—and the spiritual force behind it.

Winter's Tale, by Mark Helprin (1983), is a fantastic tale that transports readers to a Manhattan of the imagination. The biggest surprise to me was not the near poetry of the

writing but the fact I was whipping through the pages as if it were an airport thriller. It is a magical argument for faith, a deserved best-seller.

The Big Sleep, by Raymond Chandler. Well, really, *anything* by Chandler. Our Shakespeare of 1930s Los Angeles is the single best underrated writer this country has produced. The sentences crackle; you end up reading entire paragraphs aloud to savor the similes.

Silence, by Shusako Endo (1979), is a Japanese Catholic's recounting of the agonies of the first missionaries. A masterpiece.

The Cahill Catalogue, by Tom and Susan Cahill (Cahill & Co., Dobbs Ferry, New York). They recommend books and sell them. But only books they like. I discovered Dubus and Endo through their quarterly catalogue, as well as some Chandlers I hadn't read. Absolutely the best present you could give a true reader is a gift certificate and the Cahills' taste.

Sorry that I can't recommend anything to read in the art field, but very little in the art field is readable. Except *Art & Antiques*, but it's not a book (even though it's prettier and comes ten times a year and only costs \$36).

Wick Allison is editor in chief and publisher of Art & Antiques.