

Tahrir Square, Tel Aviv

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AMRAM MITZNA is a nice guy. He is modest and radiates credibility. He reminds one of the late Lova Eliav, the Secretary General of the Labor party who quit the party in disgust. Like Eliav, he has a lot of practical achievements to his credit – Eliav built the Lakhish area villages in South-Central Israel, Mitzna volunteered to administer the remote town of Yerucham deep in the Negev.

“Buji” Hertzog is also a good guy. He is a scion of a genuine Jewish aristocratic family, in the positive sense of the word; his grandfather was a Chief Rabbi, his father the President of Israel. A person whose deeds as Minister for Welfare speak for themselves – even though he has an unfortunate habit of running - after every action - to tell his (American) friends, as the Wikileaks papers disclose. (This is an allusion to a classic Israeli joke: “Why do Israeli men finish so quickly? Because they can't wait to run and tell their friends.”)

Amir Peretz is an interesting character. His life story as an immigrant from Morocco is impressive. He made the mistake of his life when he demanded the post of Minister of Defense and made a mess of it – but people can learn from their mistakes.

Shelly Yacimovich is an assertive woman, a convinced feminist. The social misery of the destitute and downtrodden is burning in her bones, as we say in Hebrew. She believes that it is possible to have a party devoted entirely to these matters, forgetting for the time being unpopular and troublesome problems like peace. That is a mistake – he (or she) who runs away from the Palestinian question, the Palestinian question will run after him (or her). But she will learn.

All these are candidates for the leadership of the Labor Party. Any of them can, perhaps, arrest its deterioration and keep the votes it got at the last elections, and perhaps-perhaps even add two or three seats.

So what?

THE PITY is that this would change almost nothing. Power would remain in the hands of the Right. The balance between the blocs – Right and Left – would not be any different.

Those who once put their faith in the ascent of Kadima have by now learned that Kadima is not a leftist party, nor even a center party – unless the center has shifted far to the right. Kadima is Likud B, pure and simple, led by a woman who grew up in a Likud home and is lacking, so it seems, any political instincts. Her party includes, besides parliamentary zeroes, several racists whose proper place is between Likud and Lieberman, and some fugitives from Labor, whose proper place is nowhere.

The Labor Party can be rehabilitated. Some parties resemble the phoenix and can return from the grave. But Labor is an old bird without any feathers. For most of its long life it was the ruling party, and it has never recovered from that. Even in opposition it behaves and talks like a governing party from which the government has been stolen. It has no strength left to

renew, rebel, storm ahead. It was and remains a federation of professional functionaries. Such a party does not make revolutions.

Under the leadership of any of these candidates, it will not fill the huge gap in the Israeli political system. It will not inspire the Israeli Tahrir Square. It will not start the revolution, without which Israel will continue to march in lockstep towards the abyss.

THE PEOPLE who gathered in Tahrir Square were not the remnants of the old parties. Sure, they were there too – the Wafdists, the last of the Nasserists, the Communists, the Muslim Brothers. But they did not provide the ardor, they did not light the flame which is brightening the sky above the entire Arab world.

In the square, completely new forces appeared out of nowhere. To this very day they have no name, except the date of the original event – January 25. But everyone knows where they came from and what they look like. For lack of a better label, they are called “the Young Generation”. They are a cluster of hopes and aspirations touching all spheres of life. They are the resolve to create “another Egypt”, entirely different from the Egypt of only yesterday.

THERE IS, of course, almost no similarity between Egypt and Israel. The Egyptian uprising can serve us, at most, as a metaphor, a symbol. But the principle is the same: the longing for “another Israel”, for the Second Israeli Republic.

The setting up of a new political movement is an act of creation. There is no recipe for it, like “Take 2 Oriental Jews, 1 Russian, half a rabbi, stir well. . .” It doesn't work that way. Neither will something like “Take the remnants of the Labor Party, add a spoonful of Meretz, mix with half a glass of Kadima. . .”. Won't work.

A new movement of the sort that is needed has to come from nowhere. From the vision and determination of a group of young leaders with a new world-view that suits the needs of Israel's future. A group that thinks in a new way, sees things in a new light, speaks a new language.

That happens once in a generation, if at all. When it does, it is visible from afar.

AT THIS moment, there are at least half a dozen groups in Israel which are planning this revolution. Perhaps one of them will succeed. Perhaps not, and the spark does not catch till some later date. As the young Jewish rabbi from Nazareth said: “You will know them by their fruit.”

For any group to bring about this miracle, several things seem to me to be absolutely essential:

The new world-view must embrace all spheres of public life. Welfare without peace is nonsense, without a basic change of values peace will not come about, the immortal ideals of freedom, justice, equality and democracy must apply to everybody,

in all spheres of life.

Many “pragmatists” assert that the opposite is true. God forbid mixing things. If you talk about peace, the advocates of welfare will leave. If you champion the rights of minorities, say goodbye to the people of the majority. That is true if you think about the next elections, not if you think about the next generations.

Anyone who sets out with the aim of winning the most seats in the coming elections will not make history. Sprinters will not bring back the medal we need. This demands Marathon runners. (Menachem Begin, it may be remembered, lost nine elections before he achieved the Big Change of 1977. What did Yigael Yadin or Tommy Lapid achieve with their ephemeral little triumphs.)

A movement that appears out of nowhere, a movement that carries the future in its womb, cannot speak the language of yesterday. It must bring with it a new language – a new terminology, new slogans. Such a language is not born in a public relations agency. Those who copy the language of their predecessors are condemned to continue on the path of their predecessors.

The new language must touch the minds – and, more importantly, the hearts – of all citizens. Another new Ashkenazi party will not do. The new movement must touch the depths of the soul of Jews and Arabs, Orientals and “Russians”, secular and religious (at least some of them), old-timers and new arrivals,

the well-established and the poor. Anyone who gives up in advance on any of these communities is courting failure.

MANY CLEVER and experienced people will smile condescendingly. That’s utopian, they will say. Nice dreams. Won’t happen. There are no such people, no such visions, no fire in the bones. At most, good people with an eye on a seat in the next Knesset.

They may be right. But these same people would have smiled if somebody had told them, some five years ago, that American voters would elect an African-American president whose middle name is Hussein. That would have sounded wildly absurd. A black president? White voters? In the USA?

The very same people would have burst out laughing if somebody had told them, just a year ago, that a million Egyptians would gather in the central square of Cairo and change the face of their country. What? Egyptians? This lazy and passive people? A country which in all its 6000 years of recorded history has not made even half a dozen revolutions? Ridiculous!

Well, there are surprises in history. Sometimes, when the need arises, peoples can surprise themselves. It can happen here. If it does, it will not surprise those of us who believe in our people.

True, Rabin Square is not Tahrir Square. But then, neither was it.