

The Bogie Horror Show

MY FIRST thought was: Good God, this man was responsible for the lives of our soldiers!

The second thought was: What's the big surprise? You always knew what kind of person he was! After all, during his years as the army's Chief of Staff he quietly supported the setting up of "illegal" settlement outposts all over the West Bank!

The third thought: And this person is now Vice Prime Minister and a member of the "Sextet" – the six ministers who constitute the real government of Israel.

THE OCCASION for these frightening thoughts was the participation of Moshe ("Bogie") Ya'alon in a gathering of the Jewish Leadership Faction. "Peace Now is a virus," he said there. And not only they. "All the media" are also a virus. They influence the public discourse "in a distorted manner, a lying manner". The virus also includes "the elite" in general.

In addition, the "politicians" are to blame. "Every time the politicians bring in the dove of peace, we, the army, have to clean up after it."

His summing up: "The Jews have a right to settle in any place throughout Eretz Israel." And if this upsets the Americans, Ya'alon has a ready answer: "I am not afraid of the Americans!"

All this was said a few days after Ya'alon paid a well publicized visit to the occupied territories, accompanied by Shas leader Eli Yishai and several other ministers of the extreme Right. This band visited the settlement outposts, which the Israeli government long ago promised the Americans to dismantle, and expressed total opposition to their evacuation. They concluded their visit in Homesh, the West Bank settlement evacuated by Ariel Sharon in the course of the "disengagement". Ya'alon demanded the resettlement of the place.

THESE TONES come together in a frightening melody, a tune we know all too well. It is anthem of fascism.

First: the term "elite". In the jargon of the Israeli extreme Right, this includes everybody they hate: the intellectuals, the universities, the liberal politicians, the Supreme Court, the media.

The term is rooted in the Latin verb "eligere", to pick out, meaning the best, the select. Since this is an undefined body, the term can be applied to different targets. When the demagogues address the Oriental Jewish masses, "the elite" clearly consists of the Ashkenazis who rule the country. When addressing the religious community, "the elite" consist of the secular, the atheist, who are strangers to Jewish Tradition. When addressing the Russian immigrants, "the elite" consists of the old established Israelis, the native born, who obstruct the path of the new immigrants.

When one bundles all these together, there emerges a picture of "them" and "us". "Them" – the handful of arrogant old-timers, who occupy all the key positions in the state, and "us" – the simple, honest people, the patriots, the keepers of tradition, the discriminated against, the oppressed.

Every fascist group in the world entertains such a view of "the elite".

(Never mind that Ya'alon, like most of the other demagogues, himself belongs to the elite. He was born in the country, an Ashkenazi of Ukrainian descent. His original name was Smilansky. He is still officially a member of an "elitist" kibbutz and belongs to the super-privileged senior officers' corps.)

Second: The traitors. There is an enemy within. This is no less dangerous than the foreign enemy, indeed, much more dangerous. When Ya'alon speaks about Peace Now, he means all the peace camp, the liberal and secular section of society. That is the Fifth Column, the Trojan horse within the walls. They have to be eliminated, before one can turn to fight the foreign foe.

Third: The "politicians". The demagogues are, of course, themselves politicians, but they exclude themselves here. Ya'alon paints a picture of "the politicians" who bring in a disgusting peace dove, whose excrement the army has to clean up.

The knavish, scheming, cowardly politicians on the one side, the clean-cut, heroic, loyal army on the other – that is a very familiar picture. The best known example was current in Germany after World War I. The "knife in the back" legend was a stepping stone to power for Adolf Hitler: the German army stood up to the enemy and had victory in its sights, when "the politicians", the Jews, the socialists and the other "November criminals" stuck a knife in the back of the heroic fighters.

The peace dove leaves its droppings and the soldiers are compelled to clean up the filth of peace.

And also: "All the media". That is one of the marks of fascism in Israel and throughout the world. The media are always "leftist", "anti-national", they are the "hostile media". The journalists and broadcasters are a secret league of Israel-bashers, who spread lies and distort reality in order to undermine national morale, defame the army, besmirch our national values and give comfort to the enemy.

Reality is, of course, very, very different. The Israeli media slavishly repeat the official propaganda in all national and security matters. They are conformist to a high degree and mobilized from wall to wall. There is not a single leftist newspaper in the country. Most political correspondents repeat like parrots the statements of "official sources"; almost all the correspondents for Arab affairs are former army

intelligence officers; and almost all military correspondents serve as unofficial army spokesmen. In the news pages and news programs, right-wing terminology reigns supreme. But because in less important matters the media criticize the government, as they are duty-bound to do in a democratic society, it is easy to portray them as "leftist" and subversive. The same is true for academia.

And finally: The "virus". The description of political opponents as infectious agents or disgusting vermin is one of the most distinguishing features of the extreme Right. It is sufficient to remember Dr. Joseph Goebbels' film "The Eternal Jew", in which the Jews were shown as rats spreading disease.

If one puts all these features together - the hatred of "the elite", the glorification of the army, the contempt for "the politicians", the demonization of the peace camp, the incitement against the media - it's the ugly face of fascism that emerges. Here in Israel and all over the world.

NO LESS important are the location and the company.

Ya'alon spoke at a gathering of the "Jewish Leadership Faction". This is a group of ultra-ultra rightists, who entered the Likud with the declared objective of conquering it from within. It is headed by one Moshe Feiglin, hence its followers are usually called "the Feiglins".

On the eve of the last elections, Binyamin Netanyahu made an all-out effort, using kosher and not-so-kosher means, to remove Feiglin from the Likud's list of candidates. He was determined to avoid the Likud being presented as an extreme-Right party. The Likud's main competitor, Kadima, defined itself as a center or moderate-rightist party and tried very hard to push Netanyahu to the right. Netanyahu thought that by driving the Feiglins out he could blunt this attack.

The question is whether this was his only aim. If so, why did he raise Benny Begin, a person who personifies the far-right, into a conspicuous place on the list? And why did he enlist and embrace Moshe Ya'alon, who was already known as a person of extreme rightist views? That embrace was very costly, since in the end Kadima, against all expectations, won one seat more than the Likud.

But Netanyahu, a born politician, had more than one objective in mind. He was afraid that Feiglin would one day threaten his hold on the Likud leadership. To forestall this possibility, he denied Feiglin a seat in the Knesset.

And here comes Ya'alon, Netanyahu's pampered protégé, and joins Feiglin of all people. As the Hebrew saying goes, the swallow went to visit the crow. But it is not quite clear who is the swallow and who the crow. Is Feiglin using Ya'alon - or is Ya'alon intending to use Feiglin in order to position himself as the leader of a big extreme-Right camp?

ONE SHOULD also pay attention to Ya'alon's declaration that "I am not afraid of the Americans". The Americans demand the freezing of the settlements? To hell with them! Who do they think they are? What, these Goyim are ordering us around? Barack Obama wants to tell us where we can settle and where we can't?

That is another feature of the emerging Israeli fascism: the readiness to engage in an open confrontation with the United States, and especially with President Obama. Already an Israeli campaign against "Barack Saddam Hussein", the New Hitler, is in full swing. The American Right and the Israeli Right easily find a common language. An Israeli woman in the US is heading the well publicized effort to prove that Obama was not born in the US, that his father never was a US citizen, and that he should therefore be driven out of the White House.

The whole thing borders on madness. Israel is dependent on the US for practically everything: economic assistance, arms, intelligence cooperation, diplomatic support like the veto in the Security Council. Netanyahu is trying to avoid a confrontation by using every trick of deceit and diversion. And here come Ya'alon & Co. and call for an open revolt against the USA!

There is method in this madness. The Israeli education system glorifies the Zealots, who some 1940 years ago declared war on the Roman Empire. The Zealots became the leaders of the Jewish community in Palestine and launched a revolt that had no chance at all of succeeding. The rebels were defeated, Jerusalem was destroyed, the Temple was burned to the ground.

THE BOGIE HORROR SHOW has wider ramifications.

It presents a picture of a mad group of extremists challenging the moderate, responsible Netanyahu. Netanyahu signals to Obama and his people: Help! If you pressure me on the freezing of the settlements and the dismantling of the outposts, it will be the end of me! My government will fall, and you will have to deal with the crazies!

That would be more convincing, if Netanyahu had used his legal prerogative and dismissed Ya'alon from the government, even though that represents a political risk. Instead, "Bibi" summoned "Bogie", like a headmaster who summons a boy and orders him to write a hundred times "I shall be a good boy". So Ya'alon remains Vice Prime Minister, Minister in Charge of Strategic Affairs and a member of the governing Sextet of Ministers (the others being Avigdor Lieberman, Benny Begin, Eli Yishai, Dan Meridor and Binyamin Netanyahu himself.)

This being so, Netanyahu cannot evade responsibility for everything Ya'alon does and says.