

The Israeli Macron

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April 29, 2017

A DEEP SIGH OF RELIEF, coming straight from the heart.

When I was 10 years old, my family fled from Nazi Germany. We were fearful that the Gestapo was after us. When we approached the French border, our fear was acute. Then our train crossed the bridge that separated Germany from France, and we heaved a deep sigh of relief.

It was almost the same sigh. France has again sent a message of freedom.

Emmanuel Macron (Emmanuel is a Hebrew name, meaning "God is with us") has won the first round, and there is a strong possibility that he will win the second round, too.

This is not just a French affair. It concerns all mankind. **FIRST OF** all, it has broken a spell.

After the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump, there arose the myth that a dark, ultra right-wing, fascist or near-fascist wave is bound to submerge the democratic world. It's a decree of fate. Force majeure.

First Marine Le Pen. Then that obnoxious Dutchman. Then Eastern European rightists. They will crush democracy everywhere. Nothing to be done about it.

And here comes somebody that nobody has ever heard of, and breaks the spell. He has shown that decent people can come together and change the course of history.

That is a message significant not just for France, but for everybody. Even for us in Israel.

IT IS not yet finished. The second round is still before us.

Looking at the map of the first round, the picture is disturbing enough. Le Pen has conquered a large part of France, the north and almost all the east. The disaster may still be looming.

Facing this possibility, almost all the other candidates have thrown their weight behind Macron. It is the decent thing to do. Especially noble for competing candidates, who cannot be expected to like him.

The one exception is the far-left candidate, Jean-Luc Melenchon, who was supported by the Communists. For him, Le Pen and Macron are the same. For people with a memory for history, this sounds ominous.

In 1933, the German Communists attacked the Social-

ists more than they attacked Hitler. In some large strikes, the communist "Red Front" even cooperated with Hitler's storm-troopers. Their theory was that both Hitler and the Socialists were capitalist stooges. Also, they were sure that the ridiculous Hitler would disappear after some months in power, freeing the way for the World Revolution.

They had ample time to repent their folly, when they sat together with the socialists in the Nazi concentration camps.

The French communists of that time learned the lesson. Three years later they formed a united front with the French socialists, and the Jewish socialist Leon Blum was elected Prime Minister.

By now, this lesson seems to have been forgotten.

However, at this moment, the victory of Macron seems fairly assured. Inshallah, as our Arab friends say.

THE MOST interesting aspect of the French election, like the American one and even the British referendum, is the end of the parties.

For centuries, political parties have dominated the public arena. The political party was the essential component of political life. Likeminded people set up a political association, published a program, elected a leader and took part in elections.

Alas, no more.

Television has changed all this.

TV is a very powerful, but also very limited, medium. It shows people. Actually, it shows mostly heads. It is most effective when it shows a head talking to the viewer.

TV does not show parties. It can talk about parties, but not really show them.

It is even worse at presenting party programs. Somebody can read them out on television, but that is boring. Few viewers really listen to them.

The practical upshot is that in modern politics, the leader becomes more and more important, and the party and its program less and less. I am not saying anything new, all this has been said many times before. But this year the process dominated the results.

The Brexit result crossed party lines. The Labor party, a powerful presence for generations, seems to be breaking up.

Donald Trump officially represented the Republican

Party, but did he? Seems the party loathes him, his hold on it is in practice a hostile takeover. It was Trump that was elected, not the party or a non-existent program.

These were extraordinary events. But the French elections took place in an ordinary, traditional framework. The result was that all traditional parties were destroyed, that all programs were blown away by the wind. What emerged was a person, practically without a party and without a program, with almost no political experience. He looks good on TV, he sounds good on TV, he was a good receptacle for votes that were primarily cast to stop the fascists.

That is a lesson not only for France, but for all democratic countries.

IT IS a lesson for Israel, too. A very important one.

We have already seen the beginning of this process. We now have a number of non-parties, with non-programs, which have gained a firm foothold in the Knesset.

For example, the party of the present Minister of Defense, Avigdor Lieberman. An immigrant from Moldova, he set up a “party” which appealed to immigrants from the Soviet Union. A party without internal elections, where all candidates are chosen by the leader and changed at (his) whim, without a real program, only a strong fascistic whiff. He is his sole spokesman on TV. He started with a strong anti-religious message, aimed at “Russian” voters, but is slowly turning around. No one among his people dares to raise questions.

Much the same situation prevails in the “party” of Ya’ir Lapid. The son of a TV personality with near-fascist views,

he is a good-looking, smooth-talking fellow, totally devoid of ideas, who is now beating Netanyahu in the polls. No program, just a party that is his personal instrument. He alone appoints all candidates. He alone appears on TV. He, too, started as anti-religious and is turning around.¹

Moshe Kahlon, a former Likudnik of North African descent, has lately set up a personal outfit, no real party, no real program. He, too, appoints all candidates on his list. He is now Minister of Finance.

The Labor party, which was once an all-powerful force that dominated the political scene for 44 consecutive years—before the state was born and after—is now a pitiful ruin, much like its French counterpart. Its leader, Yitzhak Herzog, is interchangeable with Francois Hollande.

And then there is the supreme master of TV, Binyamin Netanyahu, intellectually hollow, with ever changing hair-color, for and against the two-state solution, for and against everything else.

WHAT CAN we learn from the French?

Not to despair, when it looks as though we are on the way to disaster. To escape from fatalism and into optimism. Optimism and action.

Out of nowhere a new person can appear. On the ruins of the established parties, a new political force can arise, discarding the old language of left and right, speaking a new language of peace and social justice.

Hey you, out there! What are you waiting for? The country is waiting for you!

¹You cannot attain power in Israel without the religious parties, unless you are ready—God forbid—to cooperate with the Arab parties.