

The Lesser Evil

Uri Avnery

November 5, 2016

MODERN READERS OF coffee grounds. The polls are no more exact. The winner will be the PLE ? the Party of Lesser Evil. Or, in this case, the Candidate of Lesser Evil. People will not vote FOR somebody, but AGAINST somebody. Against the greater evil. This is a world-wide phenomenon. In almost all democratic countries, the Lesser Evil wins. SINCE THE foundation of the State of Israel in 1948, we have had 20 elections for parliament. The parliament (Knesset) then elected the Government. In five of these elections I voted for myself ? in three of them I voted for a party I headed, in one for a party in which I belonged to the opening three, and in one for a list in which I occupied the honored 120th place. In all the 15 other elections I voted for the PLE ? the party I considered the lesser evil. Not for a party I loved. Not for a party I admired. Not for a party I considered good. Such a party did not exist. So I just voted for a party I believed would do the least harm to the state and to the aim I consider paramount: peace with the Palestinian people and the entire Arab and Muslim world. The selection process is quite simple. You put in front of you the names of all the party lists: generally in Israel between 10 and 20. Then you eliminate the worst. And so on, until only one remains. Sure, this does not sound very exciting. You don't leave the polling station in the mood to dance in the street. But you fulfill your civic duty in a sensible way. You are a responsible citizen. YOU CAN, of course, decide not to vote at all. You say to yourself, virtuously, they are all the same, they are all bad, a righteous person like myself cannot in good conscience vote for any of them. In practice, that is a very bad decision. If you do not vote for the lesser evil, you effectively vote for the most popular evil. The same goes in the American system. Voting for a third party candidate, somebody who has no chance of winning, however nice he or she may be, is bad. It gives you a good feeling. But in reality it means throwing your valuable vote away. It is ? if you will excuse me ? a kind of political onanism. ABOUT THE systems. I have always been a stout defender of the Israeli system of proportional representation. Citizens vote for a party list. Frankly, I profited from it, since not one of the lists I headed ever achieved more than 2. However, looking at the system now in hindsight I am not so sure anymore.

It tends to fill the Knesset with nobodies. In practice, the party Fuehrer appoints all the candidates who appear on the list, and fills them with people he or she can rely on unconditionally. The most consistent practitioner of this is Avigdor Lieberman, who in every election kicks out all the Knesset members of his "Israel is our Home" party, and fills the list with new persons, who are of course totally dependent on him. In the two largest parties there are primary elections, but the result is similar. This system has now degenerated to the point of no return. In practice, citizens vote for the party leader. Many of the other current Knesset members spend their time in frantic efforts to attract public attention with ever more monstrous "initiatives". They are responsible to no one but their party leader. Now I prefer the British system. There the country is divided into voting districts, each district elects one Member of Parliament. The MP remains responsible to the voters of his or her district. He/she must fulfill their hopes in order to be elected again. True, this system also has a big fault: winner takes all, All votes given to other candidates are lost. 45BACK TO the blessed USA. There the election system is quite different. The voters indirectly elect a president ? the heir to the British absolute monarch who ruled the country before the founding of the republic. American presidents have immense powers. All other democratic presidents and Prime Ministers around the world can only envy them. In these elections, there are only two real candidates. American voters have to choose between them. Everything else is nonsense. In the coming elections, neither of the two candidates is very attractive. Americans could adore Abraham Lincoln, admire Franklin Delano Roosevelt, love John Kennedy and his wife. The present candidates arouse no such feelings. So for most reasonable citizens it is a question of the Lesser Evil. If both are bad, who is the badder? For me, a citizen of another country, there is no question at all. First of all, irrespective of considerations of character, there is the question of experience. I wonder if there has ever been a candidate for the presidency who has never, ever, held public office. Not as vice president, not as governor, not as senator or representative, not as dogcatcher. Politics is a profession. Not a very pretty one, for sure, but a profession nonetheless. One learns how to do things. How to achieve aims. How to manipulate the

