

# A Task in search of a Hero

Uri Avnery

August 1, 2015

SOME 60 YEARS AGO the new Egyptian ruler, Gamal Abd-al-Nasser, wrote a book about the “Philosophy of the Revolution”. Imitating the playwright Luigi Pirandello (“Six Characters in Search of an Author”) he claimed that the task of unifying the Arab world was “in search of a hero”.

At this moment, the task of creating an Israeli force able to get rid of Binyamin Netanyahu and his gang of political hooligans is crying out for a hero.

Somewhere, among the millions of Israeli men and women, there must be hidden the hero who will save Israel.

ZEHAVA GALON, the leader of the Meretz party, last week shocked many of her followers by musing aloud that her party must join with another party in order to survive and take part in the endeavor to replace the right-wing government.

Clearly, she was speaking out of fear. Meretz, the leftist Zionist party, was almost eliminated in the last elections. At the height of the election campaign, opinion polls indicated that the party might not pass the 4% minimum clause. One of the results would have been the loss of all its votes.

The reports alarmed many voters, who rushed at the last minute to the aid of Meretz. Instead of voting for Labor (disguised this time as “the Zionist Camp”), they voted for Meretz and saved her. It entered the present Knesset with five seats, just above the minimum.

For Galon and her colleagues, the shock was immense. On the morrow of the election, she resigned, but shortly after she thought better of it, and resigned from her resignation. She remained the party's leader.

Now she obviously fears that in the next elections, Meretz may disappear. She wants Meretz to merge in some way with at least one other party.

Meretz is located between the “Zionist Camp” and the “Joint List”, which unites all the Arab parties, who also feared that otherwise none of its components would pass the 4% threshold.

The trouble (for Galon) is that neither of the two adjoining parties shows any willingness to receive her party.

The “Zionist Camp” (a.k.a. Labor Party) is deadly afraid of being labeled leftist. It wants to be “center”, in the belief that there can be found the votes which it des-

perately needs to return to power. Accepting a union with Meretz would taint it with an even worse leftist tinge.

On the other side, the Arab list cannot marry Meretz either. The list consists of three divergent forces: the Communists (which include some Jewish members), the Islamists and the Arab nationalists. At least the last two will not accept a Zionist Jewish party into their alliance.

Galon's wishful plan has, therefore, very little chance of being fulfilled. Meretz, which at its height had 12 Knesset members, is in existential danger. This would mean that the slim chances for wresting power from the far-right coalition would become even slimmer.

THERE IS something basically wrong with this entire approach.

Politics is not a game of Lego. One cannot treat parties as building blocks, put them together and take them apart at will. Parties consist of human beings, each of whom has their own mind.

By putting two losing parties together one does not necessarily create one winning party. In politics, two and two do not necessarily amount to four. With luck, they can be five. But they can easily slip to three.

A union of Meretz and the Zionist Camp may lose a lot of centrist voters who detest leftist attitudes, and at the same time the union could lose leftists, who would not give their precious vote to the Zionist Camp which they consider, not without reason, as a kind of diluted Likud.

The attitudes of the Zionist Camp are, at best, wishy-washy. Its leader, Yitzhak Herzog, has volunteered to go to the US as Netanyahu's proxy in the stupid propaganda war against the US-Iran deal. It does not raise its voice against the almost daily shootings of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank. It whispers in the struggle against the tycoons who are stealing Israel's few natural resources. It hardly raises its voice against the Likud campaign against the Supreme Court.<sup>1</sup>

Meretz is not very much more courageous. It hardly mentions the word “Peace” (a four-letter word in Hebrew), preferring to speak about a “political settlement”. People don't die for a “political settlement”.

Many Meretz voters with profound Zionist convictions will not vote for a list that includes an Arab member like MK Hanin Zuabi, a provocative person who has made it a sport to twist the noses and shock the minds of average

<sup>1</sup>A Likud deputy minister demanded the disqualification of Arab judges who do not sing the national anthem, which celebrates the “Jewish soul”.

Jewish Israelis.

**BUT THE** main problem concerns leadership.

Zehava Galon is a nice person. She is honest and straightforward. She thinks and says all the right things. One could vote for her with a clear conscience.

The trouble is that she does not radiate charisma. One can vote for her, support her, even like her. But one cannot get excited about her. She is not a rousing orator, she does not inspire love or devotion.

Unfortunately, the same goes for all the other leaders of the prospective alliance. Yitzhak Herzog, Tzipi Livni and Shelly Yachimovich are all good people. I would unhesitatingly buy a used car from any of them. They often say sensible things. But none of them can rouse people, inspire them, cause them to follow them en masse.

Worse, none of them has anything new to say. All of them can be quite boring. Watching them on TV, one does not feel an irresistible urge to jump up from the armchair and run into the street, shouting “Down with Netanyahu!”

**WHAT ISRAEL** needs is just that: a hero. A leader.

A person (male or female) who inspires people, who attracts their love and devotion, who gets them to want to change things.

Not only on election day, once every few years, but every day, now.

It is not only a matter of personality, of charisma, though that is essential, too. It is first of all a matter of ideas, of convictions.

People in Israel have the impression that the left is left without anything new. No new faces, no new ideas, no new slogans for a long, long time. The left is—how to put it—just unexciting.

Nobody is going to die for something called the “center-left”. This is an American import, without any roots in Israeli political traditions. It conveys the idea of something wishy-washy, non-committal, vague, a bit of this and a bit of that.

What we need is somebody who raises a new flag, who radiates a new conviction, who is able to clad the eternal truths in new ideological garments—yes Peace, yes Equality, yes Justice, yes Patriotism, in a way that people, and especially young people, can get enthusiastic about.

In Jewish legend, there is the Maccabee who raises the flag and shouts: “Whoever is for God, join me!” Something like this is needed.

**AFTER THE** last elections I hoped that this would happen now. Everybody was shocked. Netanyahu's surprise victory and the setting up of a far-far right government should have roused every right-thinking (and left-thinking) Israeli patriot from their indifference.

Well, it did not. For a few days there was a lot of excitement, politicians talked about “a new beginning”, and that was that. Everything returned comfortably to what

there was before.

Except that there is a government composed of people who none of us could have even imagined thirty years ago. Like a swarm of mosquitoes they have settled on the country, proposing and passing laws that make one's hair stand on end. The latest: ten years in prison for throwing a stone—unless the thrower is a Jewish settler confronting the soldiers, as happened several times this week.<sup>2</sup>

How did this bunch of rabid anti-democrats become ministers and deputy ministers? Netanyahu took pains to boot out of his party all the moderate, sensible disciples of Vladimir Jabotinsky and Menachem Begin, who could have competed with him. Instead he promoted a group of wildly ambitious nobodies without any qualifications except a violent streak. They now man (and woman) the ministries.

It is my belief that one can judge a leader by the people with whom he surrounds himself. A self-assured leader chooses serious and competent assistants. A leader who is unsure of himself surrounds himself with nobodies, who do not endanger his position and compared to whom he looks like a genius. Netanyahu, for short.

**THERE IS** one point in Zehava Galon's proposal that deserves special attention.

She did not exclude the possibility of a union between Meretz and the Arab list. In today's Israel, that comes near to a mental revolution.

During the first decades of Israel, the bond between the Israeli peace movement and the Arab citizens was close and getting closer. I myself have taken part in organizing many joint demonstration for peace and equality.

During the last few decades, that process has been reversed, until almost nothing remains. Arab citizens are deeply disappointed with the Jewish left, Jewish Leftists are afraid of looking like “Arab-lovers” and anti-Zionists.

The same has happened between the Israeli peace movement and the Palestinians in the occupied territories. Israeli leftists were afraid of looking unpatriotic. After Yitzhak Rabin's assassination, Palestinians felt that Israeli leftists were not much different from Israeli rightists. Also, since Arafat's demise, Palestinians are afraid of anything that looks like “normalization”, that may be construed as acquiescing in the occupation.

No sensible Israeli can be expected to believe in peace, if even Israeli leftists cannot cooperate with Arab political forces in Israel, much less with the Palestinians in the occupied territories.

Establishing such cooperation is, therefore, the first must of any new awakening of the Israeli peace forces and a broad new movement to overturn the right-wing coalition that is dragging Israel down, away from peace, away from democracy, away from justice.

If the hero is listening, let him or her please stand up.

---

<sup>2</sup>As somebody joked: Goliath would have put the young David in prison, and the Bible would have looked quite different.