

ISRAEL'S ELEVENTH KNESSET ELECTION

Don Peretz and Sammy Smooha

Several trends observed in Israel's ninth and tenth Knesset elections were reinforced by the results of the eleventh. Politics is still dominated by two large blocs, Labor and Likud, although movement toward a two party system was arrested by resurgence of more than a dozen other parties that won Knesset seats. Polarization along ethnic lines which characterized voting in the last two elections is even more pronounced. The electorate continues its movement toward conservatism marked by election of several candidates in small right of center factions and only minor differences on most vital domestic issues in the platforms of Labor and Likud. Fragmentation of the Orthodox religious parties, once the third largest bloc, continues after the setback suffered by the National Religious Party (NRP) in the tenth election.

A major difference was the absence of former Likud leader, Menachem Begin, an active participant in all previous elections. After resigning as prime minister in September 1983, Begin withdrew completely from political life, and from his place on the Likud Knesset list. Begin's retreat because of health and other personal reasons astonished and disappointed his colleagues, especially since he refused to play any role in the campaign, even refusing to endorse Likud or its candidates.

Begin's disappearance may have been a factor in characterization of the election as "the cleanest . . . in the country's 36-year old history," by Justice Gavriel Bach, chairman of the Central Election Committee, the official body designated to supervise the campaign.¹ Before the election there were dire warnings that it would be the most violent in the country's history, even more violent than 1981, a campaign notable for its vehemence. Bach mentioned threats

1. *Jerusalem Post*, August 1, 1984.

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TABLE 1 *Estimate of Knesset Seats by Modeen Ezrachi (ME) and Dahaf (D)*

| Party | ME March | D early April | ME end April | D early May | D end May | D early June | ME May | ME June | D June | D July 3 | ME July 4 |
|------------|-------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|----------------|-----------------|
| Alignment | 55 | 52 | 53 | 55 | 54 | 52 | 52 | 51 | 54 | 53 | 47 |
| Likud | 37 | 41 | 40 | 40 | 42 | 39 | 40 | 36 | 39 | 38 | 37 |
| NRP | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4-5 | 4 |
| Agudat Is. | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4-3 | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| Shas | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | 1 |
| Shinui | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1-2 | 4 |
| CRM | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1-2 | 2 |
| Tami | 4 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1-2 | 2 |
| Tehiya | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 7 |
| Yahad | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3-4 | 3 |
| Morasha | — | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | 1-2 | 1 | 1-2 | 2 |
| Eliav | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — |
| Kach | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 |

Adapted from *Maariv*, July 10, 1984

that: "The violence of the 1981 elections campaign will seem like child's play compared with this campaign."² The threats were never realized, according to Bach, because Israelis stuck "to their democratic ideals" and the parties voluntarily entered fair practices agreements; and because campaign workers showed a "remarkable spirit of goodwill towards each other."

Other observers called it Israel's dullest election; indeed it may have been, for no charismatic figure dominated, differences between the programs of the two major parties were minimal, and each seemed to make a conscious effort to avoid confrontation. The Labor Alignment's strategy was aimed at winning votes of disappointed Likud supporters and middle-of-the-road floating voters. Labor de-emphasised attacks on personalities with almost no mention of Begin. Rather it charged Likud with mismanagement and economic failures and called itself the party of hope.

The Likud, on the other hand, made an issue of Alignment leader Shimon Peres' character. Likud leaders recognized how small his personal following was and how extensive pockets of mistrust of him were. Playing on themes that had seemed successful in the past, Likud attempted to portray itself as "the national camp" and the Alignment as the party of privilege, corruption, and dovish extremism, hinting at disloyalty on the part of several Labor notables.

2. *Ibid.*

TABLE 2 *Number of Seats Forecast for Likud and Alignment, Difference between Them, and Sum of their Votes*

| Time | Likud | Labor | Difference | Total of Labor and Likud |
|--|-------|-------|------------|--------------------------|
| 1981 election | 48 | 47 | 1 | 95 |
| End July 1981 | 49 | 44 | 5 | 93 |
| September 1981 | 51 | 44 | 7 | 95 |
| March 1982 | 54 | 44 | 10 | 98 |
| September 1982 Before Beirut Massacre | 64 | 34 | 30 | 98 |
| Sept. 82 After Massacre | 60 | 39 | 21 | 99 |
| January 1983 | 57 | 39 | 18 | 96 |
| March 1983 | 58 | 42 | 16 | 100 |
| July 1983 | 50 | 47 | 3 | 97 |
| October 1983 | 40 | 54 | -14 | 94 |
| December 1983 | 41 | 57 | -16 | 98 |
| February 1984 | 37 | 61 | -24 | 98 |
| March 1984 | 36 | 51 | -15 | 87 |
| June 1984 | 38 | 53 | -15 | 91 |
| July 1984 | 37 | 47 | -10 | 84 |

Adapted from *Ha'aretz*, July 20, 1984

ELECTION POLLS

Results of electoral polls were frequently published throughout the campaign.³ They seemed to capture more attention than other activities. At times it appeared as though the election was a national lottery rather than a political event to determine Israel's future. Election polls were a relatively new phenomenon. The Israeli press began to publish rather unsophisticated results as recently as the seventh Knesset election in 1969. Only three dailies gave poll results then, but by 1984 they were standard fare in every newspaper, followed closely, much like racing-sheets among horserace aficionados in the United States and Great Britain.⁴

The relatively large floating vote, which was 13 per cent by election eve, made most polls seem far off the mark throughout the campaign. As in the months before the 1981 election, Labor held a steady lead over Likud. Finally, in both elections the gap between Labor and Likud was closed on election day.

In the 1981 election the difference was one seat in Likud's favor; in 1984

3. Two of the principal polling organizations were *Modeen Ezrachi* and *Dahaf*, see Table 1.

4. See Gabriel Weimann, "Every Day is Election Day: Press Coverage of Pre-Election Polls," in *The Roots of Begin's Success: The 1981 Israel Elections*, D. Caspi, A. Diskin, and E. Gutmann (eds.), (New York: St. Martin' Press, 1984).

Labor led by three (Likud won 37.11 per cent of the votes in 1981, Labor—36.57; in 1984 Labor won 34.9 per cent and Likud 31.9). According to the polls, Likud reached the peak of its popularity during the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, when it could have obtained more than a majority in the Knesset. After the Beirut massacre, polls showed a steady decline for Likud, reaching a point early in 1984 when Labor theoretically could have received 24 more seats than Likud if an election had been held.⁵

PARTY INFIGHTING

Intraparty squabbles over places on the electoral list and factionalization also characterized the 1984 campaign. The first serious rift was Tami party leader Aharon Abuhatzera's break with the Likud government coalition. After several disagreements over economic and social policies, Tami voted with the Labor opposition for early elections. Tami's three votes led to a 61 to 58 majority against the government when the issue came up in the Knesset on March 22, and the election was fixed for July 23, more than a year earlier than required by the country's election law, which calls for elections at least every four years.

There were disagreements among important factions in both Likud and the Alignment. Many members of the Herut party, the dominant Likud faction, felt that the La'am and Liberal parties were over-represented on the electoral list. Herut, the strongly nationalist party established by Menachem Begin in 1948, perceived the Liberals (former Progressive and General Zionist moderates) and La'am (an outgrowth of Rafi Labor dissidents once led by Ben Gurion) as weak reeds, unable to carry their weight and undeserving of the number of seats allocated to them in the Tenth Knesset. After bitter bargaining, the number of safe Liberal and La'am places, i.e., places high enough on the electoral list to guarantee Knesset seats, were reduced. One editorial writer labeled the Liberals, "the Invisibles . . . a collection of politicians without a constituency" symbolizing bourgeois values antithetical to the populist rhetoric of Herut.⁶

Also, with Begin gone there was disagreement among leaders of his Herut party over its top positions. Most obstreperous was ex-general and ex-defense minister Ariel Sharon, demoted to minister without portfolio after the Kahan commission report on the Beirut Sabra and Chatilla massacres. Although Sharon coveted the top position on the Likud list, he was only number five. Yitzhak Shamir, Begin's former foreign minister and replacement as prime minister, was chosen as leader by the party council.

The Labor Alignment was also plagued by divisiveness. Its two principal components, the Mapam and Labor parties, were distant ideologically. Mapam,

5. *Maariv*, July 10, 1984; *Ha-Aretz*, July 20, 1984; see table 2.

6. *Jerusalem Post*, June 27, 1984.

formerly a Marxist socialist party, had been allocated every seventh place on the Alignment list. To many in the dominant Labor party it appeared to be riding Labor's coattails, like the Liberals who rode the coattails of Herut in Likud. Many Mapam members had long chafed under Labor party domination and felt that they had made too many compromises in the interest of "Labor unity." Mapam representation in top places on the list was reduced and it remained in the Alignment until after the election when it formed its own separate Knesset delegation to protest the Peres-Shamir national unity government formed in September.

The Alignment faced a far more difficult task than other parties in forming its Knesset list. Its spectrum of clients is much wider than Likud's, including hawks and doves, Marxists and capitalists, Orientals and Ashkenazis, religious and secular Jews. In forming the list, safe places had to be provided for Mapam, for two former Likud Knesset members who defected to the Alignment, for representatives of the Arab community, the Kibbutz and Moshav movements, and for a minimum number of women. To some observers the Alignment looked like a political supermarket with all brands of ideology at reasonable prices. One writer described it as a centrist, neo-liberal bloc, with pluralism as the name of the game.⁷

PARTY PROLIFERATION

Indeed, pluralism was the name of the game when 26 electoral lists registered for the election in June. Voter disappointment with Labor and Likud resulted in election of a larger number of tiny factions than in any election since the second in 1951. The loss of ten Knesset seats by the two large blocs showed up in election of five more parties in the eleventh Knesset than in the tenth. Thirteen parties of the 26 were new, established since the 1981 election. They included several ethnic factions, new lists representing Jews of Indian and of Georgian origin, several formed by single individuals formerly associated with major parties such as Lova Eliav, ex-Labor Party Secretary-General, and Ometz led by Yigal Hurvitz, Likud ex-finance minister, the perennial Flatto Sharon*, the Movement for Renewal of a Zionist Society led by the Labor defector Mordechai Ben Porat, and a list called EMUNAH (Faith) formed by NRP women dissatisfied with their lack of influence in the religious party (it was disbanded before the election under pressure from the NRP).

Only two of the 26 lists were challenged as not fit to run, Meir Kahane's Kach party, and the new Progressive List for Peace (PLP). Even the Communist-based

7. *Jerusalem Post*, August 30, 1984.

*Flatto Sharon fled France, where he was charged with financial misdealings, in the 1970's, came to Israel and ran for the Knesset to escape extradition. He was elected in 1977 for one term only.

Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (DFPE) was accepted within the legitimate political spectrum.

Kach was previously on the ballot but had failed to win the one per cent of votes necessary for a Knesset seat. In this election its slogans and platform seemed shriller than before, arousing apprehension among those who feared the spread of deep social and ethnic divisions. Among the more provocative of Kahane's campaign statements was his promise to rid the country of all Arabs, citizens or not, by force if necessary.

The newly formed PLP was perceived by many mainstream Israelis as subversive because of its call for recognition of and negotiations with the PLO and creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza alongside Israel. While hardly radical in terms of international consensus, overt dealings with the PLO were unacceptable to Israel's mainstream Jewish consensus. The party was led by Haifa lawyer Muhammad Miari, who once belonged to el-Ard, an Arab nationalist group barred from elections by the Supreme Court in 1965, and by retired major-general Matti Peled, now lecturer in Arabic literature at Tel Aviv University and known for his sympathy for, and connections with, the Palestinian nationalist movement.

A series of efforts to ban Kach and PLP were frustrated when the Supreme Court nullified decisions of the Central Election Committee to strike both from the ballot. The Election Committee members opposed Kach because it "advocates racist and anti-democratic principles; openly supports [Jewish] terrorism; fans hatred against various sectors of the population; offends the religious values of the citizenry; and negates in its goals the foundations of Israeli democracy."⁸ The Committee voted against the PLP because it included "subversive elements and tendencies, key persons on the list were identified with enemies of the State," and because its principles endanger "the integrity and existence of the State of Israel, and the preservation of its uniqueness as a Jewish State . . ."⁹ Since 1948 the only other party banned was el-Ard, but now the judiciary was more inclined to disregard strictures of the Election Committee than to avoid precedents which might limit political activity in the future.

The publicity gained by Kach and PLP through efforts to ban them seemed to attract rather than repel voters. After two previous election failures, Kach broke the one per cent barrier, with nearly 26,000 votes to win Kahane his first Knesset seat. The PLP scored exceptionally well, to win two seats with over 38,000 votes.

The Kahane list received media exposure far exceeding the importance of its 1.2 per cent of the votes. What was significant about his victory was Kahane's ability to present with great clarity a fundamental contradiction between democracy and the Jewish-Zionist character of Israel. Others were unable to answer

8. *Jerusalem Post*, June 18, 1984.

9. *Jerusalem Post*, June 20, 1984.

questions he raised such as how to cope with Arab nationalist aspirations, with Jewish-Arab intermarriage, with equality of non-Jews and Jews in a Jewish state, and with the dilemma of integrating the occupied territories with over a million Arabs. He articulated openly fears and aspirations of a substantial part of the population that more "respectable" groups dared not touch, and conferred legitimacy on militant zealots in Gush Emunim and Tehiya whose hidden agenda did not differ greatly from Kahane's. A poll of Jewish citizens shortly before the election showed that 15 per cent thought that Arabs in the territories should be expelled; 43.5 per cent believed that Arabs could live in Israel but without citizenship rights including suffrage; only 15.5 per cent were willing to give the Arabs of the occupied territory equal rights as part of the State of Israel, and 26 per cent agreed to give them self-determination.¹⁰ Some argued that the positive aspect of Kahane's election was that it would bring to the surface these undercurrents of racism and militant nationalism, and force those "respectable" political circles who favored annexation to confront the contradictions of their ideology, making it easier to deal with by direct confrontation in the Knesset. Kahane's victory did elicit a counter reaction among liberal Knesset members and intellectuals, who began a campaign for legislation against racist incitation.

A principal cause of party proliferation was fragmentation of the religious bloc. Traditionally the NRP captured enough votes to become a smaller third bloc after Labor and Likud. From the first to the ninth elections the NRP held ten, 11 or 12 Knesset seats. But the Oriental Jewish revolt against NRP leadership in 1981 halved its Knesset membership then and led to establishment of Tami as the first Jewish ethnic party elected to the Knesset in 30 years. By 1984 there was even greater discontent among Orthodox Orientals, resulting in establishment of still another religious faction, this time an off-shoot of Agudat Israel called Shas (Sephardi Torah Guardians). Many Orientals who voted for Tami in 1981 shifted to Shas or other smaller parties because of disappointment with Abuhatzera's conviction for misuse of public funds and Tami's transformation to a semi-secular group emphasizing social reforms rather than religious tradition.

Other splits in the orthodox camp were created by sharp personality differences and disagreement over West Bank settlement policies. Morasha, formed from an NRP faction and Poale Agudat Israel (Agudat Israel Workers), was established by Orthodox Jews who wanted a more activist settlement policy in the occupied territories. Thus, the old Orthodox bloc of NRP and Agudat Israel now found itself with five parties in the eleventh Knesset (NRP, 4 seats; Shas, 4; Agudat Israel, 2; Morasha, 2; Tami, 1). Although the total number of Orthodox Knesset members was about the same, their strength was so segmented that their bargaining power was undercut when it came to forming the new government.

10. *Davar*, August 3, 1984. Results of Dahaf poll.

Disappearance of middle-sized blocs made Tehiya the third largest party with only five seats. Formed by dissidents from Begin's Herut movement, Gush Emunim members and secular members of the Greater Israel Movement (now greatly reinforced by ex-Chief of Staff Rafael Eitan) who opposed peace concessions to Egypt, Tehiya became the standard bearer of nationalist militants who wanted unequivocal annexation of the West Bank and Gaza.

Three parties succeeded because of their leaders' personal followings: Ezer Weizman's Yahad, Meir Kahane's Kach, and Yigal Hurvitz's Ometz. Weizman did well in the polls before the elections, but the three seats won by Yahad were fewer than anticipated. However, Weizman found himself in an excellent bargaining position after the election when he merged Yahad with the Labor party and received a cabinet post. The merger helped to compensate for Labor's loss of Mapam and breakup of the Alignment after formation of the new government.

Shinui, the last remnant of the once powerful Democratic Movement for Change (DMC), increased its representation from 2 to 3 seats, and the Citizens Rights Movement (CRM) tripled its strength from 1 to 3. The two parties were perceived as liberal or left of center and their platforms differed little. Shinui backed Labor in forming a national unity government while CRM became a bulwark of the new left of center opposition. Meir Kahane's one-seat Kach party was the pariah of the eleventh Knesset, the faction that all the others excoriated. Kach became even more disreputable than the 4-seat DFPE, formerly the party that the others loved to hate.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Principal campaign issues in 1984 were deterioration of the economy, continued occupation of southern Lebanon, and Jewish settlement of the West Bank. Escalating inflation, which reached 400 per cent per annum by mid-1984, symbolized the economic dilemma. Most Israelis were protected to a large extent against rising prices by indexation of wages and salaries, bank accounts linked to the dollar, and other financial schemes, but even these devices were no longer as successful as they had been in recent years. Israel's international debt was about \$22 billion, higher than Turkey's and nearly equal to Poland's; 70 per cent was owed to the US government and in loans from world Jewry. Only 23 per cent was owed private banks. The country faced a \$5 billion balance of payments deficit and rapid depletion of foreign currency reserves. A "red line" of \$3 billion in foreign currency reserves had been established, sinking below which was considered dangerous by the country's bankers. By election time in July reserves were some \$300 million below the "red line." Low worker productivity by Western standards was an overriding problem. One economic analyst pointed out that the average Israeli worker received 47 per cent of the American worker's salary, but

produced only 31 per cent as much. In the US, wages comprised 44 per cent of product costs, while in Israel wages were 66 per cent.¹¹

The economy was an issue that everyone talked about, but no party acted on. After seven years in power, Likud had failed to implement the most basic of its original promises to lower inflation, decrease the bureaucracy, cut government expenditures, and diminish the number of public sector enterprises. Half the economy was still in the public sector with 40 per cent of the workers.¹² In June 1984 Likud introduced special legislation to protect citizen's savings and to increase benefits for service veterans. Even Labor supported these "election economics" measures and they were passed accordingly. Some Likud leaders pressed finance minister Yigal Cohen-Orgad for a modified dollarization scheme, drastic income tax cuts or even abolition, but he resisted their importuning. Likud claimed to its credit a 19 per cent real increase of government investment in high tech and military industries during the year before elections. This, it asserted, was responsible for national economic growth of four to five per cent.¹³

On election eve, Likud's Cohen-Orgad promised to slash defense and welfare budgets and said that he would seek a dramatic inflation cut by freezing wages at the 1982-83 level in a deal with unions. "Free welfare, education and health subsidies" to the wealthy would be terminated. Subsidies on food and other items would be cut, and the tax system reformed. Within the next four years public sector spending would be diminished by 12 per cent, he promised.

Labor's economic program was nearly an echo of Likud's. It would introduce legislation to protect savings, to restore public confidence in the stock market, and to mobilize capital for industrial and other "productive" investments. The Labor candidate for finance minister, Gad Ya'acobi, promised "evolutionary not revolutionary" changes to prevent a decline in the standard of living. He would establish fact-finding committees on taxes leading to overhaul of the system. These measures, he hoped, would eliminate the underground which some economists believed constituted a third of the whole economy.

Both parties agreed that major budget cuts were essential, but differed over where to make them. Labor promised to save by withdrawing from Lebanon, by halting establishment of new Jewish settlements in the West Bank, and by cutting "political expenditures", i.e., payments benefiting institutions affiliated with the religious parties. The result of all these measures would cut \$1 billion from the budget and help reduce inflation to an annual rate of 85 per cent within two years, according to Ya'acobi.¹⁴

11. *Jerusalem Post*, July 11, August 8, 10, 15, 1984.

12. *Jerusalem Post*, May 21, 1984. During its seven years in office the Likud sold off only 18 minor state corporations in contrast to the previous two Labor governments which had sold 54 large enterprises including Zim Shipping and Haifa Oil Refineries.

13. *Jerusalem Post*, June 27, July 15, 1984.

14. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, no. 1226, April 29-May 6, *Jerusalem Post*, June 4,

To demonstrate the deleterious effects of Likud's economic policies, the Alignment branch in Jerusalem sold tomatoes at 1977 prices in one of the local markets; the cost was one shekel a kilo (the shekel was worth about a third of a US cent when the stunt occurred). This, fumed Likud in its protest to the Election Committee, was a typical example of Labor's unfair campaign tactics.

The only candidate with a straightforward program to rescue the economy was Yigael Hurvitz, known as "Mr. Austerity" since his days as finance minister under Begin before the 1981 election. He accused both major parties of "election economics" and offered as the program of Ometz (The Movement for Economic Recovery) unabashed austerity. In his crusade for economic sanity, he warned that whoever won the election would have to pay the bill for the past three "gluttonous" years during which the country had wasted resources in a long "orgy" of spending.¹⁵

WAR—PEACE ISSUES

Because of its diverse constituency of hawks and doves, Labor could ill afford to confront Likud seriously on foreign policy and "national" issues such as the war in Lebanon, settlement of the West Bank, and Arab affairs. Recognizing the growing public impatience with the Lebanese occupation, both parties promised to withdraw, Likud, when security conditions permitted, and Labor, within six months. Labor made no promises about uprooting settlements in the West Bank. Rather it pledged to suspend further Jewish settlement in areas heavily inhabited by Arabs and even hinted at further development of already existing settlements in regions that were deemed essential for Israel's security. While not a replica of the Allon plan, the Labor scheme for the West Bank seemed to have the plan in mind. Under no circumstances would Labor return to the 1967 borders, stated its platform, nor would a Palestinian state be tolerated west of the Jordan River. Negotiations with or recognition of the PLO were impossible without a change in the organization's charter calling for elimination of the Jewish State.

Thrown on the defensive by militant slogans of the Herut youth movement such as, "Labor will return Eretz Israel to the Enemy," and "Labor will bring the PLO to our very borders,"¹⁶ the Alignment tread cautiously on nationalist issues and made certain that Labor was not affiliated with the so-called peace forces. To demonstrate continued loyalty to the military, it opposed conscientious objection to military service in Lebanon, a phenomenon that had been increasing since the 1982 war.

10, 1984.

15. *Jerusalem Post*, June 15, 1984.

16. *Jerusalem Post*, June 11, 1984.

The major weakness of the peace forces was their lack of unified political activity. Leaders of the Peace Now Movement, largest of the various groups advocating dovish policies, were scattered among several parties including the Alignment, Shinui, CRM, PLP, and the Eliav list.

Although nationalist zealots were also scattered through several parties such as Tehiya, Likud, Kach, Morasha, and in some of the other religious parties, they were able to assert themselves more effectively because of backing they received from Likud and Tehiya. While the Alignment included a number of doves, it was unable to articulate dovish policies for the reasons stated above. After the election, the dovish components of Labor were further weakened by Mapam's withdrawal from the Alignment.

ETHNIC ISSUES

Ethnic issues were much less salient during the campaign than in 1981, but this did not prevent further polarization between Oriental and Ashkenazi Jews on election day. The larger parties increased the number of Oriental Jews in safe positions on their lists; the Alignment even allocated a token slot to former Black Panther leader Saadia Marciano. Despite efforts to achieve appearances of ethnic diversity, election results indicated that both the Alignment and Likud were becoming more ethnically homogenous—Labor, as the party of Ashkenazim, and Likud, as that of the Oriental Jews. The pattern was even more pronounced among native born and young Orientals. The decrease in economic differentials between Oriental and Ashkenazi Jews seemed to make little difference in voting preferences. Differences in income had shrunk from 35 per cent during the 1960s to 19 per cent and possession of household goods doubled among Orientals during the past two decades. The Oriental birthrate was still higher, 3.6 to 2.8 for Ashkenazim, although smaller families had facilitated upper economic mobility, resulting in greater educational opportunities and more Orientals in professional and technical occupations.¹⁷

Despite increased economic and political opportunities (33 Orientals were elected in 1984), they still resented what appeared to them the superior or patronizing attitudes of the old elites, best represented by the Alignment and its allies in the Kibbutzim and Labor bureaucracy. They saw Likud as their main channel of social mobility. Was not David Levy, an immigrant laborer from Morocco, the second or third leading candidate for Herut leader? Had not Likud appointed Moshe Levy, a son of Iraqi immigrants, as Israel's first Oriental Chief-of-Staff?

17. *Jerusalem Post*, May 22, 1984.

Although small, the decrease in Oriental votes for Labor was consistent, from 24.6 per cent in 1977, to 22.5 per cent in 1981, and 21.5 per cent in 1984. In contrast Likud's percentage of the Oriental vote increased from 51.1 per cent in 1977 to 52.3 per cent in 1984.

Orientalists who tired of seven years of Likud rule or who were disappointed in Begin's failure to confront the economic disaster facing Israel, moved to the right rather than to the left, voting for Tehiya and Kach. The militant right thus doubled its Knesset strength in 1984, from three Tehiya seats in 1981 to five, and one for Kach in 1984. The success of Kahane's Kach party was characterized by one pollster, Hanoach Smith, as "another chapter in the Sephardi voter rebellion that started in the 1977 elections and continued this week when those Sephardi Jews who were dissatisfied with the Likud's performance switched, not to Alignment, but to anti-Alignment parties such as Kach and Tehiya."¹⁸

Kahane was especially strong in small, Oriental-populated development towns such as Beit She'an, Ofakim, Beit Shemesh, and Dimona, where unemployment rates were highest and economic conditions poorest. In these places Kahane received 3.3 per cent of the total vote. In orthodox religious moshavim (small holder private farmers) he received almost as many votes, and in the poorer sectors of Jerusalem he drew 2.7 per cent. The vote for his party in larger development towns such as Beersheba, Ashdod and Ashkelon, was a much lower two per cent, but still nearly double the national total.¹⁹

The large number of Kahane voters among Orientals made up for his poor showing in cities with veteran European majorities such as Haifa and the richer parts of Tel-Aviv, where he did not even clear 0.5 percent. Ironically, Kahane, born in New York, was elected by Oriental Jews, 2.5 per cent of whom voted for him. If Orientals had constituted the total Jewish population Kach would have won three Knesset seats instead of one.²⁰

The "Oriental Revolt," a characteristic of the 1981 election, was most evident during 1984 within the ultra-religious camp, especially in the surprisingly large showing of the new Shas party. Whereas Tami had been created by Oriental disaffection with NRP during 1981, Shas was an expression of dissent within Agudat Israel. While Shas represented Oriental Jews also (its four Knesset members originated from Morocco, Afghanistan, Iraq and Yemen), Tami leadership represented Moroccan Jews. Shas leaders shunned Tami because, according to its leader, Rabbi Yitzhak Peretz, Tami lacked "rabbinical guidance."²¹ Although an offshoot of the ultra-Orthodox Agudat Israel, Shas attained the

18. *Jerusalem Post*, July 27, 1984. Sephardi is another term commonly used for Orientals or Jews from Asia and Africa, but its original meaning was those Jews whose ancestors originated in Spain before the expulsion of Jews in 1492.

19. *Jerusalem Post*, July 27, 1984; *Ha-Aretz*, August 1, 1984.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Jerusalem Post*, July 13, 1984.

spiritual guidance of a former Sephardi chief Rabbi rather than from the Aguda rabbinical Council of Torah Sages. The four Knesset seats won by Shas gave it sufficient bargaining power to replace Agudat Israel as a political force and to become part of the national unity coalition after the election.

THE ARAB VOTE

The most startling result of Arab voting was election of two PLP Knesset members. Although not an exclusive Arab party, over 90 per cent of its votes came from Arabs and its platform focused on issues of primary concern to them. PLP leader Muhammed Miari demanded reinforcement of the status of Arabic as an official language, a change in Israel's national anthem and symbols, appointment of an Arab High Court judge, elimination of the necessity for military service as a requirement to receive extra National Insurance benefits, and no compulsory military service for Israeli Arabs until peace is achieved.²²

PLP was seen by Israel's Communist Party (Rakah) as the most dangerous competitor for votes among Arab youth and nationalists who had traditionally supported the Rakah DFPE list in protest against Zionist parties (91 per cent of DFPE votes were Arab). In their appeals to growing Palestinian nationalist sentiment in the Arab community, both parties claimed that they were backed by PLO Chairman Yassir Arafat. Ironically, it was Matti Peled and other Jewish members of the PLP who met Arafat in Tunis, not Arabs on the list. In July DFPE members also met Arafat in Geneva, where, it was said, he wished them "success."²³

The struggle between PLP and DFPE was intense and bitter. Miari accused Rakah of a "dirty and brutal campaign against us."²⁴ Rakah predicted that the PLP's Uri Avneri, a former dovish Knesset member and maverick editor, would sell out to the Alignment. Boasting that its Jewish leader, Meir Wilner, met with the PLO, Rakah circulated posters proclaiming: "The Wilner-Arafat Talks Prove an Israel-Palestinian Peace is Possible!"

Seven of the 26 parties competed for Arab votes and seven Arabs were elected on lists of six different parties. Rakah continued in first place as recipient of the largest number of Arab votes, but its percentage continued to decrease from nearly 50 per cent in 1977, to 37 per cent in 1981 and 33 per cent in 1984. The Alignment remained in second place with 24 per cent, a five per cent drop since 1981. It appeared that both Rakah and the Alignment lost Arab votes to the PLP which captured a surprising 18 per cent in its first Knesset contest. The four other parties that competed in the Arab community, receiving between them about a

22. *Jerusalem Post*, August 8, 1984.

23. *Jerusalem Post*, July 13, 1984.

24. *Jerusalem Post*, August 8, 1984.

fifth of the vote, were Ezer Weizman's Yahad, Shinui, NRP, and Likud. Nearly a quarter of Yahad's votes were Arab, more than a tenth of NRP's, and over a sixth of Shinui's. The 47,000 Arab voters for the Alignment provided more than two of its Knesset seats. The importance of Arab votes was demonstrated by placement of Arabs or Druzes in safe positions on lists of the Alignment, Likud and Shinui (one from the Labor party, one Mapam, one Likud, one Shinui, in addition to one PLP, and two DFPE).

Some observers divided Arab votes between Zionist and non-Zionist parties, concluding that the 51 per cent received by Rakah and PLP represented anti-Zionist "radicalism." True, the Rakah and PLP platforms deviate from the Jewish mainstream on Arab-Israel issues, but they generally conformed with what might be considered a moderate international consensus, i.e., a two-state solution to the Arab-Israel conflict, recognition of the PLO as representative of the Palestinians, and establishment of a Palestinian state on the West Bank. Rakah and PLP together represent a sizable bloc that, were it not Arab nationalist, might be considered for partnership in a coalition government. But Labor would be reluctant to negotiate with such a bloc because of perceptions by the Jewish electorate that non-Zionist, "pro-PLO" parties are not legitimate candidates for cabinet positions.

An article in the Tel-Aviv monthly, *New Outlook*, observed that the dilemma facing Israel's Arabs is, ". . . if they want to express a strong protest against the inequities of the current system that discriminate against them and to express their clear-cut support for the Palestinian right to self-determination, their only current options are to vote for Hadash [DFPE] or the Progressive list. However, if they want to be taken into account as potential sharers of political power at the governmental level, and if they want to have a direct impact on the struggle for primacy between the Religious-Right and Center-Left blocks in Israel politics, they have to vote for one of the Zionist parties."²⁵

An indication of growing Arab political consciousness was the disappearance of "ethnic" or "notables" lists. The appearance of the PLP accounted for most of the slight increase in voting participation from 70 per cent in 1981 to 72 per cent in 1984. Growing awareness of their potential as a voting bloc forced the Labor party to abandon its separate "token" Arab factions, to integrate Arabs on its own list, and to campaign strenuously in Arab communities. Some of the smaller parties such as NRP still attempted to cultivate hamula (clan) ties. Now ideological and personal preferences are much more important. For the first time the PLP gave independent minded Arab voters who in the past might have chosen the DFPE or abstained, an opportunity to vote on issues vital to their community.

25. *New Outlook* (Tel-Aviv), August/September, 1984, p. 36.

CONCLUSION

Results of the 1984 election once again reaffirmed how deeply Israel was divided into two broad camps, the nationalist-Orthodox alliance and the Labor-center coalition. During the past decade the strength of Likud and its nationalist and religious allies had become almost equal to that of the Alignment and its associates such as Yahad, Shinui and the CRM. Although the two camps originally represented contrasting visions of Zionism and of Israel's destiny, Labor seemed to be moving toward Likud's conservative policies in an attempt to capture votes of those disaffected with Likud's performance. The country's multi-party electoral system encouraged intrabloc party formation and thus prevented either of the two major parties from obtaining the Knesset majority essential for a stable government. Rather, the continuing pattern was formation of multiparty government coalitions which tended to collapse under the burden of demands placed upon them by the diverse coalition members.

Electoral arrangements encouraged disaffection from the two main parties by facilitating formation of mini-factions by dissidents who broke from the parent organizations over personality incompatibilities or minor ideological and policy differences rather than because of major substantive disagreement. Thus, maximizing a democratic process which gives separate representation to nearly every shade and hue of political or social distinction proved to be counter-productive in forming effective and efficient governments.

The near stalemate between Likud and Labor reawakened public discussion of electoral reform, an issue that had been raised often in the Knesset and had been the principal campaign plank of the once powerful but now defunct DMC. Several proposals were on the agenda. They included raising the minimum number of votes required for representation in parliament from one to five per cent, a measure that would eliminate all but three parties from the eleventh Knesset. Another bill devised by Labor's Gad Ya'acobi would establish a system combining electoral districts with proportional representation. Ya'acobi had suggested 16 districts each with five MK's in addition to 40 elected by proportional representation from national lists, as in the existing system. National lists would require a larger number of votes for election which would be disadvantageous to smaller parties, encouraging them to unite in larger voting blocs.

Other recommendations to improve the situation included major alterations of the bureaucratic system. A study headed by Hebrew University political scientist Yehezkiel Dror, asked more authority for the prime minister including power to call new elections, as in the United Kingdom. The study found that state institutions were tending toward "rigidification," even "ossification" in health and other welfare services. The quality of the government's machinery, said Dror, was declining, "obsolete and past its prime time." Because of changing cabinet

TABLE 3 *Ethnic Voting Patterns*

| A. Oriental Jewish votes for parties in percentages | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|-------|--------|-----------|-----------------|--------------------|---------|--------|-------|
| Year | Religious parties | Likud | Tehiya | Alignment | Allied to Labor | Hurvitz | Weizman | Kahane | other |
| 1977 | 17.9 | 51.1 | — | 19.6 | 5.0 | — | — | — | 6.4 |
| 1981 | 15.7 | 51.6 | 1.3 | 21.2 | 1.3 | 1.2 (Telem) 0.5 | — | — | 2.8 |
| 1984 | 15.3 | 52.3 | 3.2 | 19.7 | 1.8 | | 1.8 | 2.5 | 2.9 |
| B. Ashkenazi vote for parties in percentages | | | | | | | | | |
| 1977 | 12.1 | 27.5 | — | 31.9 | 26.0 | — | — | — | 2.5 |
| 1981 | 9.8 | 25.5 | 3.6 | 52.3 | 5.0 | 2.0 (Telem) | — | — | 2.8 |
| 1984 | 9.5 | 19.3 | 5.0 | 50.8 | 9.0 | 1.9 | 2.0 | 0.4 | 2.3 |
| C. Oriental Jewish vote for Religious parties in percentages | | | | | | | | | |
| Year | Total | NRP | Aguda | Morasha | Tami | Shas | | | |
| 1981 | 15.7 | 5.2 | 4.0 | 1.4* | 5.1 | — | | | |
| 1984 | 15.4 | 3.5 | 1.0 | 1.4 | 3.1 | 6.4 | | | |

Adapted from *Jerusalem Post*, August 3, 1984.

* Was Poale Agudat Israel in 1981.

TABLE 4 *Arab Vote for Parties by Percentages*

| | Alignment | DFPE | Likud | NRP | Shinui | PLP | Yahad | Others |
|------|-----------|------|-------|-----|--------|-----|-------|--------|
| 1981 | 29 | 37 | 7 | 4 | 4 | — | — | 17 |
| 1984 | 24 | 33 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 18 | 6 | 7 |

Adapted from *Leket*, Nos. 41–42, June–July 1984, Advisor on Arab Affairs, Prime Minister's Office, Jerusalem.

posts from coalition to coalition few ministries could rely on long term planning and few had working planning units.²⁶

Answers to the most important questions facing Israeli society—economic deterioration, Israel-Arab relations, the religious-secular and Oriental-Ashkenazi divisions—were unlikely to be much affected by differences between Likud and Labor. On such issues the policies of both parties were captive to increasing conservative and nationalist sentiments of the country's Jewish population and of international forces beyond the control of any party. Once having overcome

26. *Jerusalem Post*, July 6, 1984.

TABLE 5 1984 Election Results

| Party or List | no. votes 1984 | Seats 1984 | percent of vote 84 | votes 81 | seats 81 | percent 81 |
|---|-------------------|---------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------|---------------|
| Labor Alignment | 724074 | 44 | 34.9 | 709075 | 47 | 36.57 |
| Likud | 661302 | 41 | 31.9 | 718762 | 48 | 37.11 |
| Tehiya | 83037 | 5 | 4.0 | 44559 | 3 | 2.31 |
| NRP | 73530 | 4 | 3.5 | 94930 | 6 | 4.92 |
| DFPE | 69815 | 4 | 3.4 | 65870 | 4 | 3.35 |
| Shas | 63605 | 4 | 3.1 | | | |
| Shinui | 54747 | 3 | 2.6 | 29060 | 2 | 1.54 |
| CRM | 49698 | 3 | 2.4 | 27123 | 1 | 1.44 |
| Yahad (Weizman) | 46302 | 3 | 2.2 | | | |
| PLP | 38012 | 2 | 1.8 | | | |
| Agudat Israel | 36079 | 2 | 1.7 | 71682 | 4 | 3.73 |
| Morasha | 33287 | 2 | 1.6 | | | |
| Tami | 31103 | 1 | 1.5 | 44559 | 3 | 2.30 |
| Kach (Kahane) | 25907 | 1 | 1.2 | 5128 | | 0.26 |
| Ometz (Hurvitz) | 23845 | 1 | 1.2 | 30600 | 2 | 1.58 |
| (Ran as Telem—State Renewal List—Oayan in 1981) | | | | | | |
| Eliav | 15348 | | 0.7 | | | |
| The Disabled | 12329 | | 0.6 | | | |
| Youth & Aliya (Georgian Jews) | 5794 | | 0.3 | | | |
| Integration-Shilov (Indian Jews) | 5499 | | 0.3 | | | |
| Zionist Renewal (Ben Porat) | 5876 | | 0.3 | | | |
| Independence (Ezra Zohar) | 4887 | | 0.2 | 4710 | | 0.24 |
| Organization for defense of tenants | 3195 | | 0.2 | | | |
| Movement for the Home- land (a flat for every discharged soldier) | 1415 | | 0.1 | | | |
| Flato Sharon | 2430 | | 0.1 | 10823 | | 0.56 |
| Has-Mas-Movement to Abolish Income Tax | 1472 | | 0.1 | 503 | | 0.03 |
| Amka (Victor Tayar) | 733 | | 0.0 | 460 | | 0.02 |
| TOTAL VOTES | 2,023,321 | | | 1,937,366 | | |

differences in personality, how to divide the spoils of office, and minor divergencies in election rhetoric, Likud and Labor established a national unity government which seemed the only way to confront the ideological shadings of Israeli politics.

While national unity offers no solution to these dilemmas, it helps make it possible for intelligent leaders to examine possibilities that they would otherwise be forced to disregard because of partisan bickering.