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JABOTINSKY-BEGIN-LIEBERMAN: THE CHANGING FACE OF THE LIKUD PARTY

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ABSTRACT

The portraits of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the founding father of the Revisionist Zionist Movement, the mother party of the current Likud, as well as that of Menachem Begin, the first ever Likud P.M are always in display when the party holds its general conferences and occasional central committee meetings. Clearly, the party takes pride in commemorating the historic leaders and their political legacy. It definitely wants its members and supporters, as well as the general public to believe that this is the case. Almost a year ago, the Likud Party held its internal primaries, in which close to 70,000 members elected their list of candidates ahead of the Knesset parliamentary elections of 22 January 2013. Benny Begin, Dan Meridor and Michael Eithan, three veteran members of the Knesset and ministers were overwhelmingly voted out. The three had a common denominator; they were considered "soft" Likudniks, moderate, Liberal-oriented politicians. They belonged to the "old guard", modeled on the traditional Revisionist Jabotinsky - Begin ideology. In their place, a group of younger leaders, known as more militant Likudniks, were elected to high places in the list of candidates. The Likud primaries were held shortly after the surprising announcement by P.M Netanyahu about the creation of an electoral bloc between Likud and the Israel Beitenu party, led by Avigdor Lieberman. Many political commentators related to both the results of the Likud primaries and the merger with Lieberman as the beginning of the "new Likud", a development which practically was in the making for a long time, and finally got its formal seal ahead of the 2013 elections. This paper is not supposed to be a detailed history of the Likud party. It is not also a theoretical discussion of the processes which lead a political party, with a well-defined ideology to change this very ideology, while professing to adhere to it. Consequently, the paper is not using a methodology which is designed to create a comparison with similar situations in other countries. Rather it is intended to describe and analyze an important chapter in the political history of the State of Israel. The narrative emphasizes the various stages through which the party evolved, by concentrating on some of the significant developments which may have irreversibly changed this historic movement. So, the main changes are analyzed as they have evolved through a

KEYWORDS

- *Jabotinsky's legacy*
- *nationalism*
- *liberalism*
- *religion*
- *social awareness*
- *intellectual openness*

long period of time, and by emphasizing the roles of particular personalities. That is being done while putting them in the context of the changes which occurred in the politics of Israel in general, due to socio-demographic-cultural developments. The sources mainly used are such, that enable us to look at the political history of the party mostly from the perspective of those who either are opponents of Likud's ideology to start with, or those who regret the changes described in the paper. The gist of the narrative is the rise of Likud to power in Israel, and staying there for 3 decades, thus taking the movement from a position of near political marginality into one of dominance. Still, the political power of Likud, judging by the number of seats in the Knesset is in a state of gradual decline. Israel is known for its shifty politics, so it is premature to predict the demise of the Likud party, and the end of the era of its political dominance, but it is definitely not premature to show, as this paper tries to do, that the current party, with Avigdor Lieberman as a key figure is fundamentally different from the movement molded after the legacy of Jabotinsky and Begin .

1. Introduction

Ze'ev Jabotinsky was an "ardent nationalist", according to the anti-Zionist historian Avi Shlaim¹, who emphasized Jabotinsky's unshakeable belief in the absolute, undisputed right of the Jewish people over Eretz Israel from both banks of the Jordan river (in a famous song, Jabotinsky referred to the river as the "sacred Jordan"). Jabotinsky believed that this territory assigned to the Jews in the original Mandate was to be the independent Jewish state, which should have been established as soon as possible. In fact, the demand for statehood became an official Zionist policy only during the Second World War², but for Jabotinsky and his followers it was a must from day one of their movement. Moreover, beyond believing in the statehood over the entire historic homeland, Jabotinsky believed also that the national-ethnic identity was the most significant source of solidarity in human history.

While Jabotinsky was an uncompromising nationalist, he was also an uncompromising Liberal. Raphaela Bilski Ben-Hur is absolutely right in referring to Jabotinsky as follows: "There is little doubt that Jabotinsky was a committed Nineteenth-Century Liberal who succeeded in adapting his liberal teachings to the complexity of the modern world. He did state that, had he been able, he would have composed a political Philosophy based entirely on the premise that every individual is a king, and whose only conclusion would have been practically anarchistic state"³. Clearly being a near anarchistic and ardent nationalist at the same time, may indicate that Jabotinsky had a complicated, multi-dimensional political thinking, and he was driven by different intellectual motivations, though it is obvious, that for him, the desire to establish a Jewish state over the historic land of Israel was the paramount consideration. Yet, the man with his prolific, open-minded political thinking, gave an example, and was a source of inspiration to his followers, to the extent, that a gamut of political groups sprung from the original Revisionist movement. Some of them went a long distance away from his original teachings⁴.

¹ A Shlaim, *The iron wall: Israel and the Arab world*, W. W. Norton, New York, 2000, p. 11

² 600 Zionist leaders from 18 countries attended the conference at the Biltmore Hotel in NYC from 6 to 11 May 1942, and declared that "Palestine be established as a Jewish commonwealth".

³ R, Bilski Ben-Hur, *Every individual a king*, Bnai Brith, Washington, DC, 1993

⁴ Among the offsprings of the Revisionist movement we can find the Kanaanites led by Yonathan Retosh,

The unison between Jewish nationalism and Liberal thinking is best illustrated by his ideas regarding the role of non-Jews in the independent Jewish state. Here are the key words of a famous song written by Jabotinsky; “Sham yirwe lo meshefa vaosher, ben Arav, ben Nazereth ubni” (“There they will live in affluence and joy, the Arab [referring to the Muslim-J.O], the Christian and my son”). As is so clear from his writings, Jabotinsky believed that there should be a clear Jewish majority, with an Arab minority, whose full rights are to be protected. For him, granting full rights meant absolute equality between all the people, regardless of their ethnic and religious differences. He specifically referred to linguistic equality, something of major importance for him, as he attached great significance to the centrality of the Hebrew language in the overall process of Jewish national revival. So, what was important to Jews was also important to Arabs. But the teacher went far beyond that. He specifically envisaged a situation whereby an Arab could fill every position in a Jewish state, even President or P.M. There was no need for any statement of loyalty on behalf of Arabs, and no other litmus test to prove it. The concept of fully –equal citizenship was dominant in his mind, and stood on its own feet. This is where his ideas about Liberal-Democracy and Jewish nationalism merged into one coherent concept, rather than collide with each other. What tends to emphasize this point, is the fact, that Jabotinsky, being an intellectually honest person as well as an unabashed Jewish nationalist was still ready to acknowledge the existence and force of Palestinian-Arab nationalism, much before many Zionist leaders, particularly from the Labor movement, came to that conclusion. Still, while recognizing the possibility of a perpetual national struggle between two competing national movements, as is so clearly exemplified in his “Iron Wall” concept, he clung adamantly to his belief in complete equality of Arabs in a Jewish state. In fact, the need for such equality was part of his concept of “Iron Wall”, which was not only based on physical force, but also on moral justification⁵.

Ze’ev Jabotinsky was not a religious Jew, and his basic, fundamental reference to the important question of state and religion was primarily determined by his liberal approach. Initially, Jabotinsky’s views reflected the primacy of nationalism, writing that “Judaism is a nation, not a religious community”⁶, though never expressing rejection of the Jewish religion, he also spelled out the fear that “a fierce clash of cultures is inevitable in this land (Eretz Israel-J.O)”⁷. At a much later stage in his career, he changed the tenor of his thinking, though not the basic premise. According to the founding document of the New Zionist Organization, in 1935, he called for a Jewish state, “established in the spirit of the Torah of Israel”⁸. He then wrote a letter to his son Eri, in which he explained that there would not be

secular Hebrew nationalists as Hillel Kook, Left-Wing supporters of Palestinian state such as Nathan Yellin Mor, messianic nationalists such Dr. Yisrael Eldad and so many others who joined and established political and intellectual movements.

⁵ Jabotinsky article about the “iron wall”, *The iron wall; we and the Arabs*, first published in Russian, Rassveyt, 4 November, 1923.

⁶ M Kremnitzer & A Fuchs, *Ze’ev Jabotinsky on democracy, equality, and individual rights*, Jerusalem, 2013, p. 13.

⁷ *ibidem*, p. 14.

⁸ *ibidem*

tolerated any religious coercion, and that the “freedom of conscience and debate is like an oxygen for religion”⁹, and kept repeating his basic belief, that the values and spirit of the Torah are, and should always be compatible with basic universal principles of freedom. He made it clear, that Jews should respect the holy places of others, because a people loses its divine spirit when it desecrates what is holy for others¹⁰. Religious Jews stuffed the Revisionist movement in large numbers, during Jabotinsky’s life time as well as afterwards, but for many years, there was no political alliance of any kind between the main organ of religious Zionism, the Mizrahi movement and the Revisionists, not even over the question of Greater Israel, though the Mizrahi shared the Revisionist opposition to the Partition plan of 1937¹¹.

Jabotinsky dealt extensively also with the question of the social-economic character of the Jewish state, and he advocated a combination of liberal, free market approach with the concept of a welfare state. In fact, Jabotinsky rejected materialism, which was part of his overall rejection of and strong opposition to Marxism¹². His spiritual-oriented approach to the need for a society based on values of justice and morality meant also strong objection to an uncontrolled market economy based on rampant Capitalism.

Altogether, Ze’ev Jabotinsky was an intellectual giant, a political innovator and a charismatic leader who left behind him a comprehensive legacy and a motivated political movement which continued to play a role in Zionist and Israeli politics. His unique contribution to Zionist thinking was the combination he created between ethnic nationalism and liberal democracy. Not an easy combination at best of times, not under the circumstances of a national struggle fought against an emerging Arab national movement, as well as the great British Empire, the super power of its time.

2. After Jabotinsky

2.1. Menachem Begin and the Herut Party. Menachem Begin and Ze’ev Jabotinsky had a very complicated personal relationship. The protocols of the Third World Beitar (the Revisionist youth movement-J.O) convention in Warsaw in 1938 portray very dramatically this state of affairs. The leader poked fun at the young rising star, saying to the delegates that Begin’s Speech sounded like the noise of a “squeaking door”...¹³. The debate though was not personal, as Begin did not dare challenge the authority of Jabotinsky. The root cause, was the feeling of many young Revisionists, that Jabotinsky was too soft towards the British policy in Eretz

⁹ M Kremnitzer & A Fuchs, op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁰ ibidem.

¹¹ Rabbi Meir Berlin, the Mizrahi leader was a strong opponent of the plan.

¹² J Heller, ‘Zeev Jabotinsky and the Revisionist revolt against materialism-in search of a world view’, *Jewish history*, vol.12, no.2, fall 1998.

¹³ Begin was the leading member of a group of more militant young Revisionists who wanted Jabotinsky to radicalize his position towards the British Mandatory government at the time of the Arab rebellion in Eretz Israel.

Israel. They wanted much more action, including a violent full-fledged rebellion, but Jabotinsky objected. Menachem Begin though made it very clear, that his loyalty and admiration to Jabotinsky remained intact.

The circumstances of Begin's accession to the position of leadership after Jabotinsky's premature death in 1940, are beyond the scope of this paper, but it is of importance to note, that his claim to the leadership was based on his years as the Commander-in-Chief of the National Military Organization (IZL-Irgun-J.O), the main Revisionist fighting organization (Lehi, the Fighters for the Freedom of Israel-Stern group, were initially part of the Revisionist orbit, but much less so in the last years of the British Mandate). Begin's command of the Irgun turned him into a revered figure in the minds of ordinary Revisionists. In fact, begin's stature as the leader of the newly-established Herut party, resembled that of Jabotinsky as the leader of the Revisionist movement. Begin was the recipient of adulation which developed into a real personality-cult. His leadership came on occasions under attack from within the party, but it is arguably the case that Herut was the Begin movement, a party whose basic political doctrines reflected those of the undisputed leader, a party which stayed firmly loyal to him throughout his active political life.

Like Jabotinsky, Begin was the undisputed leader of the movement, but the circumstances of his tenure, particularly his early years at the helm as the commander –in-chief of a armed resistance movement, meant, that the ideological aspects of the struggle were seconded by the needs of making everyday decisions affecting the lives of people. A leadership under such circumstances usually leads to levels of personal and political loyalty which compromised the strong democratic tradition created by Jabotinsky. However, Menachem Begin proved that he was aware of the possible contradictions and his leadership was characterized by a sincere effort to follow in the footsteps of the first, charismatic leader.

2.2. *Begin and Herut Core Principles – The Primacy of the Jabotinsky Legacy.* The combination of “ardent nationalism” and unabashed Liberalism, which was the trade-mark of Jabotinsky's teachings, was also at the core of Begin's ideology. As was clearly put by Kremnitzer and Fuchs, “although some in Israel hold nationalism and liberalism to be mutually exclusive, former Israeli P.M Menachem Begin was both a proud nationalist and an unwavering guardian of liberal principles”¹⁴. Begin was a dedicated believer in “Greater Israel”, or “Shlemut Hamoledet”, as was the logo of the party newspaper Herut. Yonathan Shapiro is absolutely right when emphasizing the importance of this principle in the Herut ideology¹⁵. In fact, the uncompromising doctrine of Shlemut Hamoledet was one of the main reasons, why Herut under Begin was considered an extreme party, a pariah organization, alongside the anti-Zionist Communists (Ben-Gurion coined the famous phrase “without Herut and Maki- the Communists-J.O)/ This was a stigma stuck to the party, though Begin never called upon the state to initiate a war aimed at liberating

¹⁴ M Kremnitzer & A Fuchs, *Menachem Begin on democracy and constitutional values*, Jerusalem, 2011, p. 1

¹⁵ Y Shapiro, *The road to power: Herut Party in Israel*, Suny Press, Albany, 1991.

what was called after 1949, the West Bank. Begin also shared Jabotinsky's belief that ethnic-national identity was the primary, most important source of collective solidarity. At the same time, Menachem Begin was a great believer in the unshakeable principle of total equality of the Arab citizens of the state. He consistently objected to the imposition of Military Administration on Israeli Arabs, which was abolished only in 1966, and that put him in an uncomfortable political alliance with parties of the Left, including the Communist party. Yet, Begin was unwavering in his opposition, and Tom Segev is clearly wrong when trying to explain's Begin position on this subject, to the fact that the Military Administration was based on the British Mandatory legislation which was used against Begin's Irgun. Segev, a Left-Wing distinguished historian was disingenuous by not even offering the classic Revisionist concept about Arab citizens as a possible explanation¹⁶.

Like Jabotinsky, Begin was a democrat through and through. Believing that individuals come before the state, hence the need to protect human rights of all, including the minorities. In fact, Begin's concept on this issue was classic Liberal, yet his political rivals, chief among them David Ben-Gurion daubed him a "Fascist"...Nothing was further from the truth!, but Ben-Gurion definitely had his way for too many years...Herut was the champion also of the need for absolute academic freedoms. Begin's no.2 in the party leadership, Yochanan Bader attacked the establishment of Higher Education Council in Israel, arguing that "universities can only prosper through absolute freedom, without any intervention"¹⁷, thus expressing a typical Revisionist attitude towards the possibility of government intervention in both the contents and personal composition of Israeli universities. Begin was also a supporter of the Jabotinsky theory about the desired socio-economic regime of the state, a combination of free market operating within the Welfare state. One of the main slogans of Herut was the call for "social justice", alongside the idea of Shlemut Hamoledet and the ingathering of the exiled Jews in their historic homeland. Where Begin was distinctly different than Jabotinsky, it was in his observant life-style and the frequent use of religious-motivated symbols in his oratory. Begin kept saying "with G-d 's help", but even with that in mind, it has to be emphasized, that contrary to the position of the religious parties, Begin supported the idea that there should be a constitution, and he did not speak and write about a constitution to be based only on the Jewish Halacha. He said in the Knesset, that "the day will come when a government elected by our people will fulfill the first promise made to the people ...to provide...a constitution ... for the nation will then be free...free of fear, free of hunger, free of the fear of starvation..."¹⁸.

¹⁶ T Segev, *1967: The war and the year that transformed the Middle East*, Macmillan, New York, 2007, pp.67-69 .

¹⁷ This is a very significant remark in view of the controversies aroused over attempts by Likud education ministers to bring about closure of the Department of Political Science at Ben-Gurion university for alleged anti-Zionist bias. It is noteworthy that the call for a constitution is also made in the context of Begin's overall support for the notion of a welfare state.

Menachem Begin was not a thinker-philosopher as Jabotinsky was. He was an intellectual, but primarily a political leader, having in mind the goal of taking his party to power from its position of near obscurity in the early years of the state. He fulfilled this goal, but the long road to power was to prove crucial as far as the ideological purity of the movement was concerned.

3. Likud

3.1. The Road to Power: The Begin Electoral Coalition. It was a long journey for Menachem taking him from the old, small and ideologically-pure Herut to power. The stations along the road included the union with the Liberal party, which created Gahal (the Herut-Liberal bloc-J.O), and later Likud party, a coalition of various Right-Wing factions, including some who were formerly in the historic Mapai, including sworn adherents of the historic political nemesis of Begin, David-Ben-Gurion.

When Begin came finally to power in 1977, he was a sick man, the leader of a big party (45 seats, 14 only in first Knesset elections in 1949), and the road to victory was made possible by an electoral coalition created by Begin. The first target was the Sepharadic community, which was a very small demographic minority in the Jewish population of the pre-state days. Being defined by their traditional observant way of life, and not sharing the socialist values of the mostly Ashkenazi Labor movement, which was politically and demographically dominant, meant that they considered themselves and were considered by the majority as outsiders. The IZL, commanded by Begin, had a very significant Sepharadic membership. Sepharadic voters started to gradually support Herut in elections, and Menachem Begin knew how to play up the sense of alienation of a growing number of them towards the Labor-Ashkenazi establishment. This was the beginning of an alliance of the political haves-not. It would pay Begin, Herut and Likud great political dividends¹⁹. It should be emphasized that the attraction to Likud was also influenced by the Populist posture of the party, and the prevailing impression among many Sepharadic voters that it was a socially-minded movement, much in tune with their own desire to climb up the socio-political ladder. Also, the Hawkish posture of Herut had an impact on many Sepharadic voters who left Arab states where they were considered second-class and often subjected to violence, even pogroms.

Another demographic group which was cultivated by Begin in the long years of being in the political wilderness, were Religious Zionists. Their representative party, the National Religious Party (NRP, a merger of Hamizrachi and Hapoel Hamizrachi), was a loyal partner of David Ben-Gurion and the Labor movement, but their younger generation started to question the foundations of this alliance. Also the effects of the wars of 1967 and 1973, were greatly instrumental in accelerating political change in Israel. The first led to a dramatic transformation in the religious

¹⁹ Symbolically enough, the main street of the Hatikva neighborhood in Tel-Aviv, the main Sepharadic quarter of the city was name Haezel street, not the Haganah street, something which was unheard of in any other neighborhood in Israel in its early years.

Zionist community. The results of the war, the liberation of Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria (the West Bank), were taken by the vast majority of religious Zionists to be a divine act, a step towards the final redemption of the Jewish people in its historic homeland, and thus they started a dramatic move away from the traditional moderate posture of the NRP and the coalition with the Labor movement.

Altogether, the war of 1967 enabled Begin and his movement to extricate themselves from the political ghetto which was forced upon them by Ben-Gurion and Mapai. Begin became a member of the National Unity Government, established on 1 June 1967, but even more significantly, the main platform of Herut, the Greater Israel-Shlemut Hamoledet principle, became a much more popular concept, taking Herut away from the position of ideological isolation, in fact that of complete marginality, into the very center of Israeli society²⁰.

The war of 1973 and the sense of failure felt in Israel, shattered the historic position of Labor's political dominance. In the dunes of Sinai and on the Golan Mountains, tens of thousands of young Israelis, and with them their families back home, turned their backs to a government which was perceived as incapable and worn out after so many years in power. When the votes were counted on 17 May 1977, it was clear that the Sephardic community was firmly in the Likud column, and soon afterwards, the NRP became the natural coalition partners of Likud. It was Eretz Israel which led to this alliance, between religious and secular nationalists. But in the process of creating this coalition, a momentous development occurred, the implications of which became clearer as years went by. Likud and the Religious Zionists consecrated the construction of Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria as the best way of expressing the claim to political sovereignty over these territories. However, Likud had no human reservoir of its own who could go and settle the territories, as opposed to the huge ideologically-motivated yeshiva students sent there by the lay leaders and Rabbis of the NRP. An interesting situation developed, whereby Likud sub-contracted the NRP youth to fulfill its ideology, but in the process roles changed and tables turned, as the settlers became a political force to reckon with, and they became influential not only on Likud from the outside as coalition partners, but also within the Likud party itself, because many settlers and their supporters joined Likud in order to "influence from within", in fact they became a Trojan Horse in the Likud party.

3.2. New Recruits to the Likud Coalition – The Russian Aliyya. In a span of 5 years, from the late 1980's, Israel absorbed almost one million new immigrants, Jews from the former Soviet union. A mammoth effort by all accounts, a development which also had a deep and on-going impact on every aspect of Israeli society, and surely on its political system. This wave of Aliyya came after the days of Menachem Begin as leader of Likud and PM (he resigned in 1983). But for the elections of 1992, in which the Russian vote helped bring the Labor Party and Yitzhak Rabin to power, the new immigrants always voted overwhelmingly to parties associated with

²⁰ Soon after the war, the Movement for Eretz Israel Hashlema was established, which included prominent members of the Labor movement.

Right-Wing politics, Likud, Israel Ba'aliyya of Nathan Sharansky, and later Yisrael Beitenu led by Avigdor Lieberman. Excluding 1992, the Russian parties participated in the Likud coalition governments, thus making it impossible to establish a center-Left government in Israel. The inclusion of the Russian immigrants in the Likud-religious-Sephardic coalition was not a foregone conclusion. To start with, many of these immigrants came without any religious background, so a partnership with religious parties seemed unnatural, particularly when issues such as "who is a Jew", the Law of Return and conversions to Judaism were on the political agenda. Also, the Russians came with their European cultural background, whereas a great deal of Likud voters are of Sephardic origin, representing a different cultural tradition. That said, the Russian vote became firmly locked in the Right-Wing of Israeli politics. What tilted the balance towards Likud were three factors: First, the Russian immigrant's anathema to anything Socialist, to the Left-Wing world of symbols, a sentiment based on the sense that they left "Socialist heaven", not in order to come to another version of Socialism, as presented by the Labor party and other Leftist parties. Second, the Russians came from a country not known for its democratic-Liberal tradition. For them, to join the Right-Wing parties in Israel seemed natural, as they perceived them to be less Liberal. Interestingly enough, surveys made among Russian – Jewish immigrants in the US, showed a strong measure of support for the Republican party²¹, something which places them at clear variance with the vast majority of the American – Jewish community, which votes for the Democratic party. But what has proved to be the decisive factor, is the radical nationalist approach of the overwhelming majority of the Russian immigrants. The sense, that "we are in our homeland, and do not need to hide our identity any more". Statements like this are common, and this kind of political discourse and orientation is contradictory to the Left-Wing political culture and discourse in Israel.

The rise of Likud to power is in a way the story of how Israel has changed from a variety of perspectives, demographic, ideological and cultural, from the tightly-knit Ashkenazi – oriented, secular society of the Yishuv and the dominant Labor movement, and became the Israel dominated by the new claimants to power, the new demographic communities which by virtue of their numerical superiority took over the country in 1977. It is definitely the case, that Likud knew better than Labor to adapt itself to the changes in Israeli society and take advantage of them.

4. The New Likud

The inclusion of the Russian immigrants in the Likud-led coalition further highlights the basic question dealt in this paper, which is what Likud? Avigdor Lieberman, the most prominent political leader of the Russian Aliyyah relates to Ze'ev Jabotinsky as his ideological mentor, source of inspiration²², but this claim is open for strict scrutiny. Lieberman and his movement can be regarded as the

²¹ I Somin, 'Tyler Cowen on the political attitudes of Russian Jewish immigrants', *The Volokh Conspiracy*, 23 April, 2011.

²² Lieberman's official home page of his movement.

New Right of Israel, a political movement not dissimilar to Right-Wing parties in countries of Europe grappling with the question of internal race and ethnic conflicts. It is the Lieberman belief, so much in conformity with extreme Right-Wing opinions in many European countries, that Israel should get rid of most of its Arab citizens, even if it means giving up on lands being under Israel's sovereignty since 1949. To be precise, unlike the late Rehavam Ze'evi, who specifically called for a "transfer" of the Arab Population of Israel²³, Lieberman talks about an exchange of land. In this respect it is relevant to note, that Lieberman, as well as most of his voters, got their political education in a country, the Soviet Union, known for its tough, uncompromising solutions to ethnic conflicts. Gershon Gorenberg goes against conventional wisdom when arguing that Lieberman has redefined the terms of Israeli politics, and cannot be considered Right-Wing, because of his readiness to give up parts of Israel pre-1967, as well as in Judea and Samaria²⁴, but he is wrong, even though Lieberman is even ready to give up Arab-populated neighborhoods of greater Jerusalem.

Lieberman is an integral part of the Right-Wing coalition, as he states himself to be, and due to his electoral bloc with Likud. He presides over a mostly-secular movement, but he is ultra-nationalist, and as such gained an entry ticket to the Likud coalition. But this is the "new Likud" that he joined, as not much connects Lieberman with Jabotinsky and Begin's traditions.

Not much connects also religious Zionists to the legacy of the two leaders. Likud and the Religious Zionists share a great deal in terms of a general hawkish policy on security issues, and surely with regard to the fate of the territories of Judea and Samaria and the settlements, but there still are major differences. Likud gave up on settlements in the Sinai in 1982, and former Likudniks, Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert did the same in the Gush-Katif Gaza region in 2005. Successive Likud governments expressed readiness to give up, even significantly so, in the Golan Heights²⁵. Likud was and still considers itself a secular, pragmatic party, whereas the text book of the Religious Zionists is the word of God. Definitely a great difference, however not as big as may seem to be, as Likud has been penetrated by messianic elements such as the group of M.K Moshe Feiglin, and many settlers and their supporters who are assisted by the new wave of young militant Likudniks, those who were elected in 2013, people such as M.Ks Danon, Hotobali, Levin, Elkin and others, who refer to the fate of Judea and Samaria in much the same terms as the Religious Zionists. Even the search for peace as a goal is being challenged by these people, which together with the Lieberman component in the Likud bloc constitute a majority in the Knesset caucus.

²³ There is a misunderstanding about Lieberman's transfer plan as opposed to Ze'evi's! It is essential to pinpoint to the basic difference.

²⁴ *The Atlantic*, 17 February, 2009.

²⁵ PM Shamir vehemently opposed any territorial compromise in the Golan, but not Netanyahu, and then PM Olmert, a veteran Likudnik, though he negotiated with Bashar Assad when was a Kadimah PM. See, J.Olmert, 'Israel-Syria; The elusive peace', *Digest of Middle East Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, fall 2011, pp. 202-212.

Menachem Begin was no less supporter of Shlemut Hamoledet than these people, but he gave up on the Sinai and offered self-rule to the Palestinian Arabs of Judea And Samaria. Sure, he initiated the Annexation of the Golan Heights and was An uncompromising opponent of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). He did not believe though in any solution which might compromise the built-in Jewish majority in Israel, and categorically rejected any idea about incorporating Arabs in Israel without giving them full rights. After the Sadat visit in 1977, when Begin's readiness to give up territory to Egypt stunned some of the members of his party, he did not shy away from a forceful debate with them, in which he maintained the centrality of the search for peace. M.K Danon is today declaring in unmistakable terms that the goal is not peace²⁶, and he and others in the party advocate annexation of Judea and Samaria, with the inevitable inclusion of a vast number of Arabs, and with it the tangible danger of losing the Jewish majority in the not so distant a future. When asked about the possibility of the existence of a formidable Arab minority in Israel, M.K Hotobali specifically admitted that such a state of affairs would lead to the creation of an Apartheid-like state²⁷. While PM Netanyahu formally clings to the notion of two-states solution which inevitably would lead to the surrendering of large parts of Judea and Samaria, the majority in his parliamentary faction disagrees with him. Here is a "new Likud" in action, a political party which is supposedly in the center of Israeli politics, being the largest party, the governing party, but in effect, a party which is in the midst of a process of being taken over by extremist elements. It is Likud which is closer to the "Jewish Home" party led by Naftali Bennett and guided by some fanatical Rabbis.

It can be argued that the "new Likud" attitude with regard to the possibility of peace with the Palestinians involving an historic departure from the ideology of Shlemut Hamoledet is more in tune with classic Revisionist doctrines than the more compromising position of Netanyahu, as well as people before him. Surely, the proponents of the "new Likud" uphold this notion. It is clearly problematic to write in categorical terms what would Jabotinsky have done if he was alive today, as done, for example, by the late Ben-Zion Netanyahu, with the clear aim in mind of arguing that any territorial concession would have been resisted by him²⁸, but a point needs to be mentioned in order to give us a realistic perspective; The "iron wall" doctrine of Jabotinsky formulated as early as 1923, is the Linchpin of his thoughts about the Palestinian-Arab conflict with Zionism, and is often quoted as a justification to those who claim ideological purity as opposed to the "moderate, soft" Likudniks. This is not a static concept, rather it was a reflection of what should be done by the Zionists in order to be able to reach a reasonable agreement with the other side. The "iron wall" should convince the Arabs that the extermination of Israel was impossible, and then what? Jabotinsky refrained from categorically stating that once achieved, there should be no movement on the part of the Jews

²⁶ Danon is very close to Republican politicians in the US, especially Evangelical Christians.

²⁷ Hotobali is an observant woman, who made her name as a T.V personality. She must be fully aware of the P.R damage, as well as diplomatic, that a statement like that may be causing.

²⁸ B-Z Netanyahu, 'Jabotinsky as statesman and leader of his people', in A. Bareli & P. Ginossar [eds.], *In the eye of the storm*, Jerusalem, 2004, pp. 25-39.

towards a settlement including an element of compromise. Menachem Begin came to the conclusion, that the "iron wall" was instrumental in precipitating Sadat to come to Jerusalem and make peace with Israel. He reciprocated in kind, by giving up the entire Sinai, including the Jewish settlements there, and by offering the Self-Rule plan for Judea, Samaria and Gaza. Other Likud governments, that of Netanyahu after 1996, and Sharon's before his split from Likud and the establishment of Kadimah party accepted the Oslo Accords, though grudgingly. They too did it on the basis of the conviction that the "iron wall" was in place, and Israel could follow in its footsteps and offer. Concessions, and by so doing not putting in danger the existence of the state. Moreover, the attitude towards the Jewish settlements was one of viewing them both as an expression of the unassailable right of Jews to live everywhere in the historic homeland of the Jewish people, as well as to use them as a bargaining card. In fact, it can be argued that the settlements, established by Likud governments, though heavily populated and dominated by Religious Zionists have been significantly instrumental in bringing the Palestinians to the negotiating table, thus upholding the logic of the "iron wall" concept.

Such an approach by Likud has placed it in the center of Israeli politics and was in line with the basic premises and inherent logic of classic Revisionist thinking. The approach of the new guard, being so much in line with the thinking of the Religious Zionists reflects an abandonment of the Likud legacy. Likud is not, nor has ever been, a religious-oriented party, which is governed by the rulings of Rabbis. Feiglin, Danon and co. push Likud in that direction, and the latest from the former was, that if P.M Netanyahu were to reach an agreement based on territorial concessions, he, the elected leader of the party would be ousted from Likud²⁹. It is arguably the case, that right now, it seems almost inevitable, that P.M Netanyahu may be faced with this situation of a major internal rift, if indeed he means business with the Palestinians. That could not have happened under Begin whose authority always prevailed, but then this is another Likud.

Add up to that the growing influence of Avigdor Lieberman and his own party in the Likud coalition, and the stream of new legislation offered by them, aimed at creating loyalty tests to Arab citizens of Israel, the concerted assault on the Supreme Court and the judicial system in general, the attempts to respond to the unacceptable calls for and actual boycott of Israel by imposing severe restrictions on the freedom of action of Israeli organizations supported politically and financed by the EU, and other international organizations which are critical of Israeli policies, often maliciously critical, and we get a fuller picture of what the "new Likud" is. A Likud which is not tolerant towards minorities, favoring restrictions on important institutions which are pillars of Israeli democracy, among them universities and other academic institutions, and at the same time being party in which in order to become a rising star you need to denigrate the very search for peace. Where are the days of Menachem Begin who proudly declared that "there are judges in Jerusalem" and hailed the search for peace as a key element in his political strategy?

²⁹ Danon may be considered a hot-headed young politician, but he is the newly-elected chairman of the powerful Likud Central Committee.

Last, but not least, Likud has abandoned the classic Jabotinsky-Begin welfare state approach, one that Begin referred to as “doing good with the people”, an approach based on the negation of materialism, both Marxist as well as capitalistic, in favor of the Milton Friedman classic free market approach. This change is the brain child of P.M Netanyahu, a self-styled adherent of American – Conservative concepts of free-market. The classic Likud party was a populist party, upholding the flag of free market alongside that of state-run assistance to the weak and poor. No more, and the political repercussions are dramatic. Likud is in the midst of a process whereby it is losing large segments of the poorer elements of Israel’s population, particularly in the Sepharadic community. It is arguably the case, that Israel’s economy, judging by the stats of vital elements is doing very well, and Netanyahu, as well as Olmert before him, should rightly take credit for that. However, in the process, Israel became so much divided socially, with huge and bearable economic gaps between haves and have not. Totally in contradiction with the party initial policies when first coming to power, let alone the Jabotinsky-Begin legacy.

The great political beneficiary of this situation has been the Shas party, whose establishment in the first place, had to do with developments in Israeli society which are beyond the scope of this paper, but whose continuing political success is closely related to the sense of alienation felt by many Sepharadic voters towards the party which has departed so significantly from the welfare state approach of classic Revisionism and the Begin days³⁰. The Shas electorate is composed mostly of former Likud voters, and while the leadership of that party is ultra-Orthodox, the rank and file voters are not. These are people who lost the sense of having a political home in Likud which is sympathetic to the feelings of bitterness still felt by many Sepharadim regarding their early days in Israel. Likud did a very good job of channeling these sentiments into a voting pattern, but did not know how to absorb many of the up coming young Sepharadic leaders in the ranks of its leadership. The latest example of this state of affairs is Moshe Kachlon, a rising star in the party who excelled himself as a minister in charge of reforming the cellular phone industry, and later as a welfare minister. He is out of the Knesset now, refusing to compete for a seat in the January 2013 elections, making it clear that the sharp turn of the party under P.M Netanyahu towards free market policies, based on wide-range privatization, was not his cup of tea. Likud always had a popular Sepharadic leader alongside Begin, and later P.M Shamir and Netanyahu, a leader who was both an influential political force, and also a symbol of the party openness towards the “second Israel”. David Levi, Meir Shitrit And Moshe Katzav (until his tragic downfall) come to mind. There is none now.

5. Conclusions: Quo Vadis Likud?

Israel is a dynamic, functioning democracy, still having to face with huge challenges to its national security, even existential threats, particularly if the Iranian nuclear program will not be stopped before it reaches the point of no return.

³⁰ Shas voters come from the traditional Likud electoral strongholds. It is almost a family feud...

Under such circumstances, the fact that the state is a democracy is in itself a little miracle, not something to be taken for granted. Especially so that the majority of its population moved in from countries, either in Eastern Europe or the Middle East which lacked any democratic tradition, and a sizeable portion of the population is under the influence of a formidable non-democratic dominating influence, that of Rabbis and other religious leaders who are tuned firstly of the text of holy books, rather than to the laws of a secular state. It is therefore a very fragile democracy, so if the governing party doesn't stand to protect and strengthen the democratic values, then there is a problem.

Traditionally, the extreme right in Israel was defined by its hawkish and nationalist – religious views on the fate of the territories of Judea-Samaria, but as shown in this paper, the definition should be expanded, and include also attitudes towards the Arab minority inside Israel, and some very vital aspects of Israeli democracy. The attitude towards Israeli Arabs is particularly troubling. It seems that the Lieberman approach has become dominant, even though his policies on this issue are not the official Likud policies. Surely, developments within the Arab Israeli community, which are beyond the scope of this paper, most notably, the self-styled Palestinization and the provocative behavior of many of their leaders have done a lot to bring about a sense of vitriol among many Likudniks, but then, a ruling party, especially one which prides itself of following in the footsteps of Jabotinsky and Begin simply cannot push for legislation which creates litmus tests of loyalty to the Arab citizens.

The new young militants of Likud, plus the Lieberman faction and the Jewish Home of Naftali Bennett constitute over a third of the current Knesset. This is an unprecedented situation in Israeli politics, and it is bound to have strong influence over the future course light of the Likud party, which is still the largest component of the secular nationalist-religious electoral coalition in Israel.

Moving from political marginality to power and control inevitably requires ideological compromises and political adjustments, primarily due to the need to create coalitions. By definition, political coalitions are predicated on finding a common denominator which cannot be a precise reflection of the original, small and ideologically-pure party. Menachem Begin understood this elementary political dictum when establishing the electoral coalition which led him to power. So, he took Herut from the Right-wing margins to the center of Israeli politics and society. He did it without giving up on his core beliefs about Shlemut Hamoledet, while strictly adhering to the fundamental, precious Liberal, democratic values of the historic Revisionist movement, and this combination created a winning and popular electoral coalition. The pendulum seems to have swinging back. While the emerging new forces within Likud still pay lip service to the original traditions of the party, they have a different agenda in mind. Core values are being abandoned. This is in the eye of the beholder to decide whether these changes are to welcome or to regretted.

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