

We Can Overcome

*With a responsible government we will emerge strengthened from the crisis.*

Israel, as everyone knows, is a land of contrasts - in landscape, climate and customs. But even in a land of contrasts there was nothing more upsetting than the contrast between last year's and this year's Independence Day. Last year we celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary with an impressive military parade in Jerusalem. The parade was in two parts. It passed by the platform on which the leaders of the nation sat. It was a nation extremely sure of itself. From the wings, however, solitary voices were heard warning against the self-congratulatory attitude of "we never had it better", but these were silenced in the general rejoicing and in the applause of a nation whose overwhelming majority was fully satisfied with itself and with its leaders.

A year after that very show of strength, we celebrated Independence Day in an atmosphere that needed no description - for it was carved on the faces of Israelis and in the newspaper headlines. The argument over the cancellation of festivities was, to a great extent, marginal and superfluous. A great number of us had not yet recovered (and there is no shame in admitting this) from the deaths of our friends and relatives, from the suffering of our wounded and from the anxiety over the fate of our prisoners. We have had a bereavement in the family, and we cannot get on with our daily routine, or celebrate on this day, even though it signifies our renaissance as an independent people in our own land.

But side by side with the bereavement worry, we must also remember that while we were not a great military power at the time of our parade last year, neither have we become a spent force this year. While it was impossible and unnecessary for us to defy the gentile world then, we should not forget that we are not totally without friends today. While we shouldn't have been superior and full of ourselves in 1973, we don't have to be low-spirited and meek in 1974. The secret of balanced thinking is to know the limits of one's power and to plan one's operations accordingly. A considerable part of the Israeli public, under the direction of a sensitive government, did not realize prior to the war the limits of Israeli power, and some were drunk with the idea of some imaginary power. Today there is the danger on the part of some of us to be confused over the extent of our supposed weakness. Those who observe things carefully and think clearly about Israel's position know the limits of its strength and weakness. We are engaged in a battle against an unholy alliance of rich powerful states supported by the military strength of the Soviet Union, by the oil profits, and by the power of the Arab nations still not resigned to the existence of a Jewish state in our region. These are the facts of life, and although it is very easy to sink into self-pity and to be seized by a sort of fatalistic acceptance of the unique Jewish destiny, the irrevocable facts remain.

In the struggle against this unholy alliance, Israel naturally relies upon its own strength, and upon its firm decision to be master of its own destiny. But in Israel as in all places the concept of power is very complex, compounded of politics, international sympathies, sources of supplies



military aid and assistance from others in all sorts of ways. These points may seem obvious, and there would be no need to raise them again were it not for the development of the extreme right which speaks of Israeli power in elemental terms. According to these, what matters is "power" alone, that is military force, whereas other sources of power such as the acquisition of allies and influence in the world at large are not considered, or are regarded as hopeless from the start.

According to this primitive outlook, the "world" is against Israel whatever the case, it is made up of "anti-Semitic goyim", and it is ready to sell Israel down the river at any given moment, because this has always been so. This being the case, there is no point in taking sympathy from others, and there is no room for being concerned over the rights and feelings of others.

This claim is not factually based, and it leads one to a very gloomy conclusion concerning our future. The truth is that we have to make sure that in reply to the Soviet-Arab alliance we will have our own friends and supporters. We want to enlist their support for what is right and just. But we must not stop there. We must convince them that in the long run, a strong Israel is an important political interest to the western world.

We have a chance of getting this support as we have done so far from the United States. There is a chance that we may not be forced to stand alone against the Soviet-Arab bloc. Achieving this depends partly on us, and upon our avoidance of two extremes: giving up and saying no from the start. The latter is the more dangerous tendency today. The rise of the extreme right in Israeli politics is likely to harm the basis of American-Israeli cooperation and to burn the single sure bridge that we have to outside help.

Over and beyond all protests and shocks, we should remember the facts of life and the simple truths. As important as it is to improve the Israeli party system (and I don't think I need prove how important I regard it), this is not the main problem. Before all other issues stands the question of our security. He who jeopardizes the cooperation of the United States and the rest of the world with us, he who contributes to Israel's total isolation and severance, not only from her allies but also from a large segment of diaspora Jewry, and he who leads us to a second Masada, harms one of the foundations of our security.

In comparison with this danger, all other issues pale. I would oppose the policies of Herut even if it established an inner democratic regime with elections, restricted her self-satisfied utterances and behaved according to the just claims and demands of the protest movements. It's easier for me to oppose this party because, in addition to its dangerous concept concerning foreign relations and security affairs, it does not carry out a semblance of these demands. But the main problem is still in the forefront.

Indeed, precisely at this difficult time an intellectual effort must be made to distinguish between the secondary and the important, between transitional matters and permanent ones, marginal and main issues. The most pressing problems of our lives are in connection with security (will we live?), with agriculture and economics (on what will we live?) and with

the question of our way of life and our government (how will we live?).

These three areas of life are intertwined and inter-linked. Before all else comes the question of survival, but even that is bound up with other matters. Economic efficiency improves our military and political capacity. A normal democratic government that is responsive to the public will ensure military capability and administrative skill in times of crisis, a responsible government is committed therefore to cope with Israel's main problems, and first and foremost, to the problem of our survival and our security. A partial solution will not suffice in these difficult days.

If we acquire a responsible, wise, pragmatic government, we will emerge strengthened from the present crisis. There are certain encouraging signs that can be seen already. All honour due to Israeli society that it did not skim over the grave failures of the old leadership, and that even during the war it deepened its democratic consciousness. The protest movements expressed a legitimate process, and represented a large public painfully aware of what was happening to the land and the people.

Had the protest movement not risen then there would have been reason to worry about the healthy ability of the society to recover. But the protest movement alone is not enough. What is needed is a new type of government responsive to Israel's problems, different from the problems of the Labour Party. If such a government arises, moderate, reasonable and practical, then we can surely overcome.

*(Hebrew article by Amnon Rubinstein, published in the Hebrew press)*