

19 July 1985

MISSING MANDATE

IT SEEMS necessary to recall the origins of the national unity government, its promise and its limitations. Many of the voters in the election of 1984, supporters both of the Likud and of the Alignment, wished for a coalition of the two major parties.

The crucial motive for the confluence of desire among people of conflicting political outlooks was the sense of impending economic disaster and the equally clear sense that could command the thrust and summon the courage needed for drastic action.

It says much for the sick relations between the parties that while the nature of the required urgent measures was clear to everybody, the public believed that neither party in government on its own would be able to implement such measures – because it would be hampered and harassed at every step by the party in opposition. Citizens praying for a unity government on election day nevertheless voted for the party closest to their political leanings and hoped for the best.

The miracle happened. When the votes were counted, and after weeks of partisan maneuvering, it became clear that in whatever pattern the smaller parties were arranged and re-arranged on the one side or the other, neither party could command an adequate majority for viable government, certainly not for executing drastic economic measures.

The history of the ten months of unity government has confirmed that, despite some frictions and recriminations, the serious difficulties it has encountered do not flow from conflict between the Likud and the Alignment – and that the still long road to recovery can be successfully traversed only by a unity government.

SOME LABOUR spokesmen have been behaving as though they have forgotten that the stalemate, which forced upon them and upon the Likud the formation of a government to launch a feasible consensual policy, remains a stalemate in the field of major foreign policy. There is no consensus there on the crucial question of our time: to whom Palestine? Some of Mr. Peres's colleagues and followers pretend that he has a mandate to implement the 1984 election platform of the Labour Alignment. They have been urging him to act accordingly and not to let the Likud stand in his way.

They remind him that in autumn 1986 he will be expected to hand over the premier's office to Mr. Shamir – precisely because of the stalemate – and that he should therefore act quickly. They wish him to create an accomplished fact in foreign policy, which Mr. Shamir will be unable to undo; and thus also to outwit the electorate which, in its collective wisdom, tied the hands of both parties.

THIS MOOD and tendency in the Labour Party is being encouraged and exploited by the U.S. administration. It is no secret that up to July 1984 Washington was praying that the Labour Alignment should win the election; that it would then be able to reverse the Likud's rejection of the Reagan Plan, and agree to negotiate with King Hussein on its bases.

How could this be envisaged? The Labour Party could accommodate itself to the Reagan Plan only if it abandoned its long cherished, much-publicized notion that a "territorial compromise" would bring peace with the Arabs. Under a liberal construction

of the Reagan Plan Israel could indeed offer Labour's territorial compromise – the Allon Plan, that is, a withdrawal from two-thirds of Judea and Samaria – but would get in return not the peace treaty envisaged by Allon, but a “partial” peace, presumably a form of armistice, during which the Arabs would continue their campaign for Israel's surrender of the rest.

It has become apparent that at least some elements in the Labour Party are prepared to amend its policy accordingly – envisaging the surrender, in a second stage, of all of Judea and Samaria (with Gaza thrown in) to Hussein. Abba Eban, who has presumably forgotten that this would mean Israel's returning to the “death trap” of 1949, some time ago claimed that a new version of the Allon Plan – offering a surrender of two-thirds and leaving the remaining one-third open to “negotiation” – was actually submitted to Hussein himself.

The fact that Mr. Peres in 1982 had praised the Reagan Plan – and may even, as was reported, have been consulted on its drafting – lends credence to the suggestion that he too is prepared to consider complete, if phased, surrender to Arab demands.

DESPITE Labour's failure to win the election in 1984, Washington did not give up hope. In any case, it still had some maneuvering to accomplish. Hussein could not move without Arafat. He did finally secure the consent of the deflated PLO leader to his negotiating (with the Americans) but only on condition that he would include in his delegation Palestinians that Arafat would nominate.

The U.S. government has consequently been directing its diplomacy at the noble purpose of promoting two pretences. One is that Hussein and Arafat have, in joint labour, produced a brand-new “peace” plan (which is, of course, in sum, the demand that Israel withdraw from all the territories including East Jerusalem and, on closer examination, that Israel restore the “refugees” of 1948 to their homes in Jaffa, Haifa, Jerusalem *et al.*)

The other pretence is that delegates nominated by the leader of the PLO are not PLO spokesmen, and that the U.S. would not, by negotiating with them, be violating its pledge of 1975 not to negotiate with the PLO (a pledge for which Israel at that time paid in territory and in oil).

Now, after its own projected meetings with the Hussein-Arafat delegation, Washington intends pressing Israel similarly to meet with such a delegation – that is, to negotiate with Arafat's emissaries.

It is banking on Peres somehow to push through his government a favourable response to this pressure.

A RATIONAL concern for the national interest, an intelligent examination of the realities and a minimal degree of national self-respect dictate the rejection not only of Washington's thesis on the subject of Arab-Israeli conflict but also on its consistently one-sided intervention. Its issuing a certificate of *de facto* recognition of the PLO only renders more ludicrous the appearance of the U.S. as a “mediator,” an “honest broker” between Israel and the Arabs.

The U.S. government has a view of its own, firmly held and untiringly pursued for years. It accepts implicitly the essential Arab premises and their demands. The origins of its policy are in the traditional hostility to Zionism in the State Department. It ignores the Jewish nation's unique relationship to its homeland, and the unique relationship of

Palestine to the Jewish people. It has accommodated itself to the hoax that Palestine is the property of the Arabs, that there are (and always have been) not only one but two Arab national entities in Palestine, one East of the Jordan, the other West.

It ignores the history of the Arab aggression against the State of Israel since its birth, and has cooperated in Arab efforts to ensure that they should not be deprived of the fruits of their aggression. The Rogers Plan of 1969, the Reagan Plan of 1982, and all the intervening plans and planlets often accompanied by words of sympathy for Israel and concern for her security, are all expressive of these dominant themes.

IT CAN BE argued that the U.S. is entitled to its view, essential to its own interests in the region. It is difficult to see what possible U.S. interest would be served by the reduction of its only dependable and effective ally in the area to a miserable, dependent existence, threatened moreover by neighbours dedicated – by religious precept and by national ambition – to the ideal of its destruction. There are of course many Americans who deplore and oppose their establishment's bizarre policy.

Surely it cannot be disputed that for Washington to hold and actively pursue this policy and to appear in the snow-white cloak of honest mediator is the height of cynicism. That Israeli governments have accepted the U.S. in this role is not the least of the fatuities of Israel's foreign policies over the years.

Certainly the present government has no mandate to negotiate with the Americans, the Jordanians on the terms proposed, or with the PLO on any terms or in any guise. By any criterion of logic or canon of democracy, the election stalemate of 1984 dictates the maintenance of the *status quo*, including the rejection of the Reagan Plan – until and unless the Knesset, or the electorate, decides otherwise.