

December 30, 2005

## **TWO FACES OF A BULLY**

This period of political chaos in Israel calls to mind a popular tale from the days of the Soviets. An election to the Supreme Soviet is in progress, and Dmitri Pavlov, a peasant from a village near Moscow, arrives at the polling station to cast his vote. He takes his place in the queue and finally reaches the table of the secretariat. His name is checked on the voters' list.

The chairman draws a slip from a pile on the table, and puts it into an envelope from a second pile. He is about to slide the envelope into the slotted ballot box nearby when Pavlov calls out: 'Hey, comrade, let me see whom I am voting for!' The chairman gives the peasant a shocked look. 'Don't you know, Comrade Petrov' he says 'that in a democracy, the ballot is secret!'

The 20,000-odd Israeli citizens who rushed to join Ariel Sharon's new Kadima Party are still singularly uninformed about what the party's policy is going to be. Already named Kadima, it does not give the new member a clue as to which way is forward. Nor are they enlightened by the news that some politicians have reportedly been promised ministerial posts in the new party in return for cutting their previous political associations.

They seem to be guessing that Ariel Sharon aims to be centrist, a cozy term which suggests 'moderate.' But moderate is not a fixed point in a political universe. It depends, as Sharon himself would say, 'whether you are looking from there, or from here.'

Some years ago, as reported in an American news journal, an American politician, newly returned from a visit to an Arab state, was singing the praises of its ruler, when one of his listeners called out: 'What about them cutting off the hands of convicted thieves?' 'No, no, no,' replied the politician. 'He is a moderate. In his country they only cut off the fingers.'

SHARON'S CONVERSION to moderation took place, of course, after he had been elected. It was then that he expressed the opinion that the Palestinians were entitled to a state of their own. His official endorsement of the idea came with the infamous road map the next year. Quite irrelevant to its contents, the road map should never have been accepted by Israel. It should have been sent back as 'unacceptable.' It was compiled by, or in cooperation with, parties demonstratively hostile to Israel - the United Nations and the European Union - and even sworn enemies of Israel - who had tried by war to prevent its birth and subsequently launched repeated wars aimed at its annihilation.

Saudi Arabia is mentioned as an adviser in the document, as well as the Arab League. Its stated objective was to set up a Palestinian state. Why should the government of a self-respecting sovereign nation accept a diktat - whose genesis, incidentally, was an almost exact replica of the way the Munich Pact was handed to a hapless, betrayed

Czechoslovakia in 1938? The road map was shoved at Israel as though it was a defeated enemy.

Yet Sharon swallowed the insult, tried to make it acceptable to the people of Israel by compiling 14 amendments. No sooner was it announced that Israel proposed amendments to the map, than US secretary of state Colin Powell proclaimed that no amendments would be accepted.

Nevertheless Sharon persuaded his cabinet to accept it. Its implementation was supposed to start with the ending of the terror and the disarming of the terrorists. The terrorist groups, however, had no intention of giving up their arms and Mahmoud Abbas, the head of the Palestinian Authority, proclaimed he had no intention of trying to force them to do so.

The road map thus encountered a critical snag. But Sharon, who had insisted that disarmament had to be effected before Israel did anything further, suddenly took the opposite course. He announced his unilateral 'disengagement' plan, giving up the territory of Gaza (and expelling its Jewish inhabitants).

When his own party decisively rejected the plan he did not resign. With parliamentary democracy thrown to the winds, he dismissed recalcitrant ministers, added Labor opposition members to the government and, employing the army and the police, expelled the thriving, compact Jewish communities of Gush Katif.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was delighted. This, she said, was part of the road map. It seems she saw in this an American diplomatic achievement. Nobody talks, however, about insisting on ending the terror. Indeed, the surrender of Gaza has only whetted the appetite of all - Arabs, the American establishment and Europe alike - for more surrenders of territory. To this end they are all now waiting for Sharon to come out as victor of Israel's general election in March 2006.

Civic courage and social courtesy surely require that Sharon should apologize for ruining the lives of the Katif community, explain why it was essential for the national health and why it was an urgent measure. He should moreover have stressed his thanks and admiration for the steadfast bravery of the community over the years of Arab terror directed against them. He never came to them. What he did do was to abuse them verbally and to have those who chose to resist their being driven from their homes, including youngsters of 14, treated as criminals to be sent to prison.

Yet the consequences of his reckless policy are already being felt. Hamas, heartened by its success in believing that it drove Israel out of Gaza, is still observing a truce pending its participation - fully armed - as a political party in the Palestinian national election in January. There it expects to achieve a great - if not decisive - success. On the other hand, their comrades-in-arms, Islamic Jihad, are moving their front lines forward into northern Gaza toward Israel's southern heartland around Tel Aviv. Some of their rockets have now reached Ashkelon.

NOW THE bold and daring expeller of 8,000 Jews turns out once again to be a mild lamb in foreign relations. Thus he has given a foothold (albeit small) to Egyptian troops monitoring the Philadelphi Corridor between Gaza and Egypt. He has also brought in representatives of the openly hostile European Union to oversee the Rafah crossing. He froze the long-discussed operation of closing the gap between Jerusalem and Ma'aleh Adumim (E1) to the southeast of the city. Military observers moreover are pointing to the 'restraint' displayed by Israel in responding to the ever continuing terror. Of course, the explanation offered by the obedient media is that we must help strengthen Abu Mazen in his contest with the Hamas terrorists.

Remember how, after Oslo, Israel was asked to give Arafat rifles so that he could suppress the terrorists?