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OPPOSITION FACTIONS SAY RABIN'S SLIM VICTORY OVER PERES SHOWS LABOR PARTY IS HOPELESSLY DIVIDED By Yitzhak Shargil and Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 24 (JTA)--Opposition factions seized upon the paper-thin 41-vote margin by which Premier Yitzhak Rabin defeated Defense Minister Shimon Peres for the Labor Party nomination last night as a sign that Labor is hopelessly divided and will enter the May 17 elections in a weakened condition. Most Laborites, on the other hand, insisted that the party now stands united behind Rabin and will receive a new mandate from the electorate at the polls. Rabin received 1445 votes and Peres got 1404 votes. (See related analysis p. 1.)

But some Peres supporters took a dim view of the future. Former Defense Minister Moshe Dayan said, "I am sorry about the outcome but I am sorrier about the effect this decision will have on the outcome of the general elections." Former Foreign Minister Abba Eban, a strong Peres supporter, said that "Rabin won because a desire for change was interpreted as a dismissal."

Transport Minister Gad Yacobi who also favored Peres, observed that the latter is still the second strongest man in the party. Tourism Minister Moshe Kol of the Independent Liberal Party said last night's results "indicate the democratic contest in the Labor Party which must now face the difficult problems that the country faces."

But Likud leader Menachem Begin declared that "Mr. Rabin did not gain the real confidence of his party." Likud campaign chairman Ezer Weizman indicated that Rabin will be Likud's prime target in the election race. "The Labor Party has elected a candidate for the Premiership who reflects its own image: colorless and without imagination," Weizman said.

Pessimism And Optimism

Former Interior Minister Yosef Burg of the National Religious Party said that Rabin's narrow margin indicated a difficult period for the Labor Party. He expressed doubt that the party can unite around Rabin. Prof. Yigal Yadin, leader of the new Democratic Movement for Change, said Rabin's precarious victory "reflects a deep crisis within the Labor Party that will show up on election day."

But Naftali Feder, political secretary of Mapam, expressed satisfaction with the outcome which, he said, makes it possible to preserve the Labor Alignment. "I believe Rabin will lead the Alignment to victory in the elections and he will form the next Cabinet," Feder said.

A spokesman for Gen. Ariel Sharon's new Shlomzion movement said the Labor convention "proved to the people in Israel that this is the same party, the same alignment which continues the same policies, the same system and the same incompetence." A spokesman for the leftist Moked faction said "Rabin's election was preferable to Peres, but the narrow margin means that Rabin and (Foreign Minister Yigal) Allon will continue to make policy according to Rafi

(Peres' faction) concepts which does the work for Likud."

Fear Of Reprisal Against Peres

Meanwhile, there is a feeling of uneasiness among some Peres supporters that they may face reprisals for having challenged the incumbent Premier. Rabin said at a press conference after his victory that he intended to include Peres in his next Cabinet with an "important" portfolio. But he refused to commit himself as to which portfolio will be entrusted to Peres. The Defense Ministry which he now heads is one of the senior Cabinet posts and there are few others of equal rank that he could fill.

The group that supported Peres said it would not disband. "We have to meet, discuss and decide on ways and means so that we are not hurt for supporting Peres. We have to make sure that no one is hurt for supporting Peres," a spokesman for the group said.

The convention has two more sessions scheduled. The election of a new Central Committee is expected to last well into the night. It will be followed by a debate on political issues prior to adopting the party's election platform. The plank proposed by Mapam expressing readiness for territorial concessions in all sectors in exchange for peace is expected to be approved. This plank was apparently Mapam's price for remaining in the Labor Alignment. It was paid because Mapam's defection could have seriously weakened Labor on election day.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

LABOR PARTY FACES UPHILL STRUGGLE By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 24 (JTA)--With the leadership of the Labor Party now settled by Premier Yitzhak Rabin's narrow win over Shimon Peres last night, attention is focussed on the party's uphill struggle for victory at the polls May 17. For the first time in Israel's history, the outcome of the general elections is in serious doubt. Labor, which has governed the nation since its founding, has received some severe jolts of late.

There have been scandals involving high party officials, a deteriorating economy, a festering social gap, new waves of labor unrest and an apparent deadlock in moves toward a Middle East peace settlement. The opposition has never been stronger. Likud, despite some internal differences, is priming for a fight and seems to "smell" victory in the electorate's apparent desire for changes.

The new Democratic Movement for Change headed by Prof. Yigal Yadin has grown with amazing speed since it was formed last year and has benefitted materially and psychologically from the defections of numerous prominent Laborites to its ranks.

The closeness of Rabin's victory last night has provided new ammunition for the opposition. The tiny margin of 41 votes by which the Premier retained the leadership of his party is hardly a vote of confidence. In 1973, when Rabin and

Peres battled for the Premiership left vacant by the retirement of Golda Meir, Rabin won by only 40 votes. But at that time, the leader was elected by the 600-member Central Committee. This time nearly 3000 convention delegates voted. Proportionately, Rabin's victory last night, after more than two years in office, thus was even more precarious.

Repudiation Of Rabin Claimed

Opposition leaders already are claiming that the close vote amounts to a repudiation by the Labor Party of its own policies as executed by Rabin. They also seem to be convinced that Rabin will be an easier candidate to beat than Peres. The latter is an astute politician and formidable speaker.

Rabin has come over weakly in television debates and Knesset duels. He is a poor speaker, awkward in repartee, crude in political diatribe and insensitive to audience reaction. On the other hand, notwithstanding his colorless public image, even Rabin's foes conceded that he is a tough, intelligent leader behind the scenes.

Whether he can lead his party to victory in the May elections will depend on a number of factors. It remains to be seen whether Rabin--possibly prompted by Golda Meir--will demand revenge against those Laborites who backed Peres. A bitter feud within its own ranks is something the party cannot afford. Attempts to wreak vengeance on the Peres faction would spell certain doom at the polls. Therefore, Rabin's watchword from now on must be "in victory, magnanimity."

There are many who say the Labor Party is worn out and has gone stale after nearly 30 years as Israel's governing party. But the opposition must reckon with Labor's remarkable resilience and its tremendous appetite for power. If the convention made anything clear, it was that Labor is by no means resigned to losing heavily at the polls and will fight tooth and nail to retain leadership of the government.

INCREASED NUMBERS OF TERRORISTS REPORTED IN SOUTHERN LEBANON

TEL AVIV, Feb. 24 (JTA)--Israeli military sources have confirmed reports of increased terrorist presence in southern Lebanon. This is the reason for the almost daily clashes between Christian villagers and the terrorists. According to reliable sources there are some 3500 terrorists in southern Lebanon. The largest group of 1500 controls the port city of Tyre. Another 800 are in the southeast region known as Fatahland. So far, the terrorists are located at least 15 miles from the Israeli border, but Israel is watching the situation closely.

Meanwhile, some 500 residents of south Lebanon are working in Israel and more are seeking jobs. A house in Metullah is being prepared to contain 14 classrooms to which Lebanese children will come three times a week. Meanwhile, children from south Lebanon continue to come on visits to Israeli schools where they dance and sing with Israeli children.

REPORT SOME OF SLOVAKIA'S JEWISH CEMETERIES WILL BE DEMOLISHED

LONDON, Feb. 24 (JTA)--A number of Slovakia's 600 Jewish cemeteries are going to be demolished and turned over to other uses. According to the London-based International Council of Jews from Czechoslovakia, the plan was announced to a recent meeting of the Union of Jew-

ish Communities in Slovakia.

Julius Ehrenthal, the Union's new chairman, had said that some of the abandoned pre-war cemeteries had become "hotbeds of infectious diseases which threaten the environment" and the Slovak Jewish community, numbering about 3500 people, had been unable to save them.

Last year, cemeteries at Holice, Komarno (near Bratislava), Krompachy, Komjatice, Novo Mesto and Prievidza were officially listed for demolition, and it is claimed here that people in the West and in Israel were given insufficient notice to arrange for the remains of relatives to be reburied elsewhere.

Ehrenthal is also quoted as saying that the chief rabbinat for Slovakia had been moved from Galanta to Bratislava, with Rabbi Isidor Katz remaining in charge and that a number of communities no longer are able to form a minyan for prayers and therefore would be merged with larger communities. He asked for individual hardship cases to be reported and claimed that Slovak Jews enjoyed full religious freedom and kosher facilities.

AJCONGRESS HAILS ARABS' MOVE TO DROP NEGATIVE CERTIFICATES

NEW YORK, Feb. 24 (JTA)--A report that all Arab states except Iraq have dropped requirements for so-called "negative certificates of origin" for goods imported from the United States was welcomed today by the American Jewish Congress as "an encouraging indication of progress in the fight against the Arab boycott." But Naomi Levine, executive director of the AJCongress, criticized a warning by a Saudi Arabian spokesman that the new policy could be scrapped if there were stringent new American anti-boycott legislation.

"The abandonment of the negative certificate of origin augurs well for quick passage of a strong and effective anti-boycott law which, among other things, would prohibit the use of such certificates," Mrs. Levine said, adding: "If the Arab states no longer require negative certificates, why should they object if the law prohibits them?"

Arnold Forster, general counsel of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, cautioned that the move by the Arab states may signify an effort on their part to try to soften Congressional opposition to the boycott and to try to convince Congressmen to hold off on voting in favor of anti-boycott legislation now pending in both houses of Congress.

The report of the dropping of the requirement was published by the Journal of Commerce in New York based on information that the U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce, Inc. of New York was circulating its members to that effect. A negative certificate of origin is a document filed by American suppliers at the request of Arab customers attesting that the goods are not of Israeli origin and do not contain components made in Israel.

The U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce, Inc. of New York, disclosed last week that it is forming freight forwarders, shippers and other firms involved in U.S.-Arab trade, as well as its own members, that negative certificates of origin were no longer required. The move follows agreement by ministers of the 20-nation Arab League, except for Iraq's representative, the AJCongress reported.

VANCE SAYS IT IS TOO EARLY FOR U.S. TO PROJECT MIDEAST SETTLEMENT PLAN

By Joseph Polakoff

WASHINGTON, Feb. 24 (JTA)--Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance today rejected suggestions in the Senate that the United States set forth its own plan for an Arab-Israeli settlement. He said that such action is "too early" and that a previous attempt was "counter-productive."

The Secretary also said that he believes Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, in view of his victory over Defense Minister Shimon Peres, and the latter's call for amity within the Israeli Labor Party, will be able to "negotiate for his country" in the coming discussions for a settlement.

Vance made his statement in response to a question from members of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Aid after he had submitted a statement justifying his "new directions" assistance program for the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1.

He did not give figures for any country, but chairman Daniel Inouye (D.Hawaii) said the aid program totaled \$7.5 billion and that an additional \$2 billion during the course of the year would bring the amount close to \$10 billion. U.S. assistance to international development banks has more than doubled. Israel is known to be ticketed for \$1.785 billion. Of this, \$1 billion is for military assistance.

When Inouye asked whether more funds would be appropriated during the year for Israel, Vance sharply replied he thought the sum budgeted is "adequate" and no more would be forthcoming unless the President proposed it.

Vance outlined the foreign aid budget by groupings and noted in bilateral programming that no funds are asked by the Carter Administration for this coming year on the Israel-U.S. Binational Industrial Research and Development Fund. The sum of \$30 million was budgeted by the Ford Administration for the current fiscal year.

Rabin's Victory Shores Confidence

Vance's remark about Rabin came after Sen. Bennett Johnston (D.La.) noted Rabin's headline victory over Peres yesterday for the Labor Party's nomination and asked whether that will "hurt Rabin's ability to negotiate for his own people." Vance replied that it "probably is not for me to speculate but I would point out that Peres immediately after the election gave a speech in which he called for amity." Vance added that "it looks like the party will draw together and go into the election as a unified party. It will be wrong to assume Rabin won't be able to negotiate for his country. I believe he could."

Johnston pressed for a U.S. plan this year and referred to the ill-fated Rogers Plan proposed by the former Secretary of State William Rogers in Dec. 1969, "or some other U.S. plan to try to bring the parties together to make peace in 1977." Vance replied "It would be a mistake at this point to come up with a U.S. plan and say this is it and you have to take it."

He agreed with Johnston that the step-by-step policy is not to be followed and that an overall peace settlement should be sought. But he emphasized that he opposed "at this early date to lay out a plan." Under Johnston's questioning, Vance also said that it would "be a mistake to force the process at this early stage."

Vance said that Israel's position with respect to the administered territories is that "this is a subject for discussion in negotiations between Israel and her Arab neighbors" and Israel "underscores" that withdrawal was to be "to defensible and secure boundaries." He pointed out that Israel has not specified "precisely" about the boundaries. Asked whether the Arabs accept Israel's sovereignty, Vance said, "I believe that is the case which is encompassed in a definition of peace."

U.S. WILL NOT PERMIT ISRAEL TO SELL Kfir TO ECUADOR EVEN IF THE USSR, FRANCE MOVE IN TO MAKE THE SALE

WASHINGTON, Feb. 24 (JTA)--The United States will not permit Israel to sell 24 of its Kfir fighter planes to Ecuador even if the Soviet Union or France should move in to make the sale, according to Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance.

Appearing before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Aid today, Vance said in a discussion of U.S. policy to cut the sale of its weapons abroad that "an example of the restraint we were compelled to exercise" was blocking Israel's sale worth \$200 million to her hard-pressed economy. The planes are powered by General Electric motors and the U.S. therefore has a veto over their transfer outside of Israel.

"Our policy is not to introduce advanced weapons in Latin America," Vance said, and it is "because of that we did not go along with Israel's suggestion" to sell the planes. Sen. Patrick Leahy (D.Vt.) asked Vance why pressure was put on Israel when it was "obvious" that France or the Soviet Union "will move into that area." Vance replied, "That is the risk we have to take."

Israel has asked the U.S. to reconsider its decision. It is understood that Ecuador has given Israel until March 15 to fill the contract. Since Israeli Premier Yitzhak Rabin will be in Washington the week before that date, some sources here think the U.S. might allow the sale as a gesture of support to him in his coming struggle to retain the Premiership.

ISRAELI YOUTH OPPOSE YERIDA

JERUSALEM, Feb. 24 (JTA)--The majority of Israel's youth regards emigration from Israel (yerida) as a phenomenon highly damaging to the State, a survey conducted recently by the Zionist Council in Israel showed. The survey was presented this week by the Council's chairman, Arye Zimuki, at the weekly session of the Zionist Executive. According to the survey, this position is more widely shared by religious youth (85 percent), although 75 percent of secular youth adopted the same position.

However, according to the same survey, there was a growing tendency among Israeli youth to draw dividing lines between their being Israelis and their Jewishness. Only 35 percent of the secular Jews said that had they not been born in Israel, they would have wanted to be born as Jews. However, 90 percent of the religious Jews said they would have wanted to be born as Jews anywhere else in the world.

TEL AVIV (JTA)--Three persons were killed Thursday when the jeep they were in hit a mine near the Potash Works at the southern end of the Dead Sea.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES ELECTION FEVER RUNNING HIGH

By Uzi Benziman

JERUSALEM, Feb. 24 (JTA)--Election fever is running high in Israel and excitement is rising as the country's numerous political parties and factions--some old, some new-born--prepare to put their fortunes on the line when the voters go to the polls May 17. As in all modern democracies, there has been a plethora of public opinion polls--politicians and voters alike, it would seem, cannot wait for the returns to be in. They want to know, months in advance, what the likely outcome will be.

But different polls tell different stories. On one thing, however, they all seem to agree: at this point, slightly less than three months before election day, up to 50 percent of the voters have not decided which party to support.

They are, instead, waiting and watching to see how the Labor Party will meet the challenges ahead; the efforts of Likud to modify its hawkish image; the birth pangs of Prof. Yigal Yadin's new Democratic Movement for Change; the threatened disintegration of the Independent Liberal Party; the personal conflicts within the National Religious Party; the intensive but as yet fruitless negotiations among the left-of-center groups to establish a strong socialist party.

The voting public also sees nightly on television, high-ranking military officers and senior civil servants announcing their resignations and proclaiming their devotion to one or another political faction. All of them would like to sit in the next Knesset. But the law requires them to resign from State service at least 100 days before the elections.

If the polls show one thing it is that the electorate anticipates great changes on May 17 and the beginning of a new political era for Israel. But past experience in politics shows that such expectations may be an illusion. The power structure in Israel is not likely to change.

Foreign Policy Element

One important element to be considered is that foreign policy developments can influence the national atmosphere before election day. Premier Yitzhak Rabin will visit Washington early in March. Efforts here and in the U.S. to resume peace talks before the end of this year may have a considerable impact on who the voters favor in May.

Moreover, all but the most naive voters realize that the various parties are making an all-out effort to gain support from every segment and in so doing frequently abandon their stated principles and declared goals. The Labor Party, for example, does not dare to present a clearly dovish approach that some of its leaders would favor. It prefers a watered-down ideology and vague formulations that will satisfy both the doves and hawks in its ranks.

Likud, trying to muster the widest possible support, is playing down its hard line platform on the future of the administered territories. Some elements in Likud would like to retire veteran Herut leader Menachem Begin whose uncompromising rhetoric has frightened voters in the past.

The Democratic Movement for Change has benefited from the disillusionment of both hawks and doves with the major parties and has become a political haven for both. But in order to keep that uneasy coalition together until election day

it has remained vague and non-committal as to its policies.

The NRP was on the verge of a split when former Religious Affairs Minister Yitzhak Raphael announced he would quit the party if he was given a low place on its election list that would prevent his winning a Knesset seat. According to the latest reports, however, Raphael is once more back in the bosom of his party.

Splinter Factions Abound

There are many leftist splinter factions which are trying to coalesce into a single powerful socialist bloc. But while their ideological differences may be reconcilable their personality conflicts apparently are not.

It is too early to say whether the mushrooming of new political factions--one seems to be born every day--will seriously affect the established parties. In any event, Israelis have a hard time keeping up with them. In the past 24 hours alone, three new lists announced themselves as contenders for Knesset seats.

One is a Womens List marching under a feminist banner. Another is a loosely organized coalition of wives, mothers and parents of soldiers who think a new war can be prevented only if Israel refuses to withdraw from the administered territories. The third represents 30,000 Holocaust survivors who demand better treatment and higher compensation from the government.

A fourth list has also emerged, headed by Yehoshua Peretz, former boss of the Ashdod port workers. He announced, however, that he would link up with the Black Panthers to form a coalition that speaks for the underprivileged.

ILP In Trouble

Meanwhile, the Independent Liberal Party which has been a partner in many Labor-led coalition governments, seems to be in its death throes. The ILP represents middle-class Israelis who came here from Eastern and Central Europe before and after the State was founded. It follows a moderate course in foreign affairs, favors far-reaching territorial concessions in exchange for peace and major domestic reforms. It has never had more than a half dozen seats in parliament and holds only four in the present Knesset.

The ILP is trapped in a constitutional quirk. Its two leaders, Moshe Kol and Gideon Hausner, resigned from the Rabin Cabinet last year because the Premier failed to respond to their demands for internal changes. But the Supreme Court ruled their resignations invalid since they became effective only after the Rabin government was transformed into a caretaker regime from which ministers are barred by law from quitting.

Meanwhile, another ILP leader, Hillel Seidel, resigned from the party and joined Likud. He is trying to influence other party members to do the same on the grounds that ILP programs can be realized only within the framework of a major party. But Seidel, whose hawkish views were always closer to Likud than the ILP, is regarded as a maverick in Israeli politics.

In recent weeks, the ILP has sought to form a coalition with Yadin's group, with Shulamit Aloni's Civil Rights Party and even with Gen. Ariel Sharon's Shomron faction. But all of these attempts have foundered on ideological or personality grounds.