

The Politics of Transition in Israel

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In an article published in 1962 this writer explored various aspects of nomination and election politics in Israel within the context of certain features of the system and concluded with the observation that "the electoral future of Israeli politics after the passing of Ben-Gurion is decidedly uncertain."¹ The passing of David Ben-Gurion has now become a reality despite the former Premier's continued activity in Israeli party politics; his resignation in June, 1963, heralded the end of an era, and later defeat in the internal councils of the Mapai party (Israel Labor party) and then at the polls in the Knesset (parliamentary) election of November, 1965, confirmed the event.

The transitional nature of Israeli party politics at the present time is widely acknowledged. It is asserted that drastic changes in personnel and in party form and content have inaugurated a new era in the land. It is the purpose of this study to examine and evaluate these elements of change within the context of the November, 1965, Knesset election.

A summary of the character of the Israeli party system must note some fundamental features. It is accurate to say that Israel was actually brought into existence by political parties which were well-developed organizations with ideological programs and long membership lists for years, and in some cases, decades, before the coming of statehood. Almost every one of the political parties or lists represented in the present Knesset has roots and at least some organizational history which go back into the pre-state period.

The most obvious feature of political life in Israel is the

multi-party character of the system. In the November, 1965, election to the Sixth Knesset, seventeen lists vied for voter approval, with thirteen of them obtaining the necessary one per cent of the vote to secure at least one parliamentary mandate in Israel's system of election of all 120 Knesset members on a country-wide basis under proportional representation. Throughout the period of statehood and running back to the early 1930's, one party, Mapai, has dominated, becoming the one major pluralist party of the system and the chief holder of governmental as well as non-governmental economic power. Its contributions to Israeli political life are many: It has been the major force for stability and continuity within the governmental system; it has supported the development of universalistic institutions and practices and the downgrading of particularistic and divisive tendencies; and it plays a co-ordinating role between the government and the Histadrut, the powerful labor federation and system of economic enterprises. The Mapai also plays a significant role in the recruitment and advancement of new personnel into government leadership and administration, although it should be noted that coalition-cabinet politics furnish such opportunities as well to Mapai's political partners in the cabinet through a "key" system for government jobs that still survives, the civil service system notwithstanding.²

The intense partisanship of Israeli Jewish politics has brought about the vigorous operation of a wide range of social and economic agencies and activities, including daily and foreign-language newspapers, youth movements, housing projects, financial institutions, and convalescent homes. Co-operative and collective agricultural federations are associated closely with or controlled by political parties. Every Jewish party in Israel operates a whole set of economic and social enterprises. Parties have overseas affiliates, developed as a part of the World Zionist movement, which have rendered varying amounts of financial and moral assistance to the groups in Israel, mainly for "productive, educational and economic purposes."

Israeli parties have stressed ideology and their own historical development within the framework of Zionism. Of great importance is the emphasis upon formal party membership and the

fact that a high proportion of Israeli citizens are dependent upon a particular party for news and information, cultural activities, and even jobs. Parties are highly centralized where decision-making and administrative affairs are concerned; the selection of Knesset candidates is made by committee decision without referral to the party convention, let alone the voters, in any primary election. This does not mean, however, that party bosses and managers preside over some monolithic structure. Competing internal factions, a standard feature of Israeli party life, minimize the tendency toward oligarchic control and offer some real freedom of choice and decision for rank-and-file party members.³

Another noteworthy feature of Israeli politics has been the domination of all the parties by leadership elites which are older both in terms of age and in years of party and government service. In Mapai, Ben-Gurion, Moshe Sharett, and Levi Eshkol, for example, have backgrounds in the Second Aliya immigration wave before World War I; but the phenomenon has obtained substantially in all parties.⁴ One result of this situation is the complete dominance of all Zionist parties by European (Ashkenazim) leadership as contrasted to Oriental Jewish groups who have flooded into the country in such numbers since statehood that they now constitute over half the country's Jewish population.

The overriding influence of political parties throughout major areas of Israeli society has not been presumed to carry over into the armed forces. At the beginning of statehood, under Ben-Gurion's leadership, steps were taken to free the armed forces from political influences, a process which included the dissolution of independent military organizations such as the labor-kibbutz-oriented Palmach and the right-wing Irgun Zvai Leumi. Nevertheless, top positions in the armed forces have been held by Mapai adherents or political neutrals. The Defense Ministry has always been a preserve of Mapai and, except for a period of little over a year in the mid-1950's when Ben-Gurion was in voluntary exile from active politics, was headed by the long-time Premier until his retirement from the premiership in the summer of 1963. Of the five chiefs of staff between 1948 and 1958, two were active in Mapai before and after their terms of military

service, two were known to be supporters of Mapai in private life, and one was politically neutral.⁵ This pattern tended to hold for other top military positions, although the military refrained from active political participation.

It should be mentioned, however, that over the years parliamentary supervision over military affairs (and, incidentally, foreign relations) has not been distinguished by its effectiveness. Because of Israel's beleaguered military situation, the armed forces occupy a strong and prestigious position.⁶ The Lavon Affair in the summer and fall of 1960 revealed a number of disquieting points concerning the role of the military in Israeli politics.⁷ While partisan and journalistic charges that military leaders had become too independent of civilian authority seem to have been exaggerated, the Lavon Affair did show tendencies that could become dangerous in the future. It was revealed that personnel in the top echelons of the Defense Ministry had obstructed Defense Minister Pinhas Lavon and ultimately helped bring about his resignation, and that serious sabotage and espionage operations were undertaken by military and security forces without authorization from the Defense Minister. Such problems had not arisen as long as Ben-Gurion had occupied the Defense post, and this in itself suggests that top military leaders had been nurtured too much on personal loyalty to Ben-Gurion rather than loyalty to civilian authority in the form of the Defense Minister, whoever he might be.⁸

A modest improvement in parliamentary scrutiny of the defense-security establishment was made in 1961 when a three-party ministerial committee on security headed by Ben-Gurion was established for the purpose of keeping the government coalition partners better informed on various activities of the Defense Ministry without subjecting these activities to undesirable partisan influence.⁹ The question of personal loyalty to Ben-Gurion rather than to civilian authority, however, was to arise again when Ben-Gurion broke with Mapai in 1965 to form a new party, Rafi (the Israel Labor List), and carried with him not only several of the former military or Defense Department figures associated with his position on the Lavon Affair, but also considerable numbers of former army officers.

II

POLITICS OF THE POST-BEN-GURION ERA

In this examination of the politics of transition in Israel, some further attention needs to be given to the events and developments associated with what has been termed the "passing" of Ben-Gurion. If his age—seventy-seven—did not suggest that this time his "retirement" was not just a temporary move, the political events of late 1964 and 1965 strongly indicated that the long-time Premier had indeed finally become separated from top leadership in both government and Mapai. Ben-Gurion had been chafing in retirement, and had become increasingly disaffected from his former close associate and the new Premier, Levi Eshkol. This disaffection included differences in styles of operation of the two men, but most important was disagreement over the handling of the continuing Lavon Affair, which had increasingly become an important personal matter to Ben-Gurion. Not satisfied with several investigative reports on the matter, Ben-Gurion insisted on pressing adamantly for a judicial inquiry into it, despite the serious consequences this line of action presaged for preservation of coalition government and the internal stability of Mapai itself. In December, 1964, Eshkol forced the issue by submitting his resignation and that of his cabinet. Within days he gained a unanimous vote of support within Mapai's central committee to reconstitute the cabinet, and he did so on precisely the same lines and with the same personnel as before.

In the face of continuing pressure from Ben-Gurion, the Eshkol forces in Mapai won a series of intraparty tests of strength, including a 59 per cent vote at the Mapai convention in February, 1965, on not reopening the Lavon Affair. By May of that year the struggle had developed to the point that Ben-Gurion publicly stated that Eshkol was unqualified to be Premier. Eshkol responded by demanding statements of loyalty from Mapai cabinet colleagues, an action which precipitated several cabinet resignations. It is interesting to note, however, that when Ben-Gurion led six of his Mapai Knesset colleagues out of the party in the summer of 1965 and announced the formation of the Rafi Party, his action was largely unexpected, since Mapai had man-

aged over the years to survive many other internal crises that had threatened to break up the party. For years there had been present in Mapai important centralizing forces such as a pragmatic concern for governing and a reluctance of dissident groups to secede and leave rival forces in power, considerations present particularly in pluralist parties in a mature democratic party system, and clearly operative in Israel.¹⁰

A number of developments suggesting significant changes in the Israeli political system became evident in the long 1965 Knesset campaign. One was the breaking away from Mapai of Ben-Gurion and his younger former officers and Defense colleagues with their stress on a new pragmatism and a relative downgrading of old pioneering-socialist ideals and slogans. Moreover, in the spring of 1965 two important alignments were forged in preparation for Histadrut and Knesset elections, both of which represented significant shifts in the party system. Center and right-wing forces as represented in Herut (Freedom Movement) and the Liberals formed a bloc (Gahal) for joint electoral lists and for parliamentary and local governmental co-operation, although they preserved separate party organizations.¹¹ A comparable arrangement was concluded between Mapai and its neighbor to the left, Achdut Haavoda (Unity of Labor), restoring to a considerable degree ties that had been broken more than two decades earlier when the group known as "Faction B" bolted Mapai and began a course of political action which included participation in the doctrinaire socialist Mapam (United Labor Party) and formation of the separate party Achdut Haavoda.¹²

Other changes in the constituents of Israeli political parties took place in 1965. A group of progressives who opposed a Herut-Liberal bloc retained an independent status under the name Independent Liberals, representing themselves as a mediating force near the center of the political spectrum.

A party development of limited importance within Israel, but of interest because of its implications for Jewish-Arab relations, was the breakup of the Communist party into a predominantly Jewish party on the one hand and an overwhelmingly Arab party on the other. This event took place in August, 1965, after various attempts to avert the breach, including concerned attention from

Moscow, failed. The Jewish group, headed by Shmuel Mikunis and Dr. Moshe Sneh, Knesset spokesman and editor of the daily *Kol Haam*, came off with the major property assets of the party, including national headquarters; the great majority of Jewish members; and a small number of Arabs. The other group, headed by Tewfik Toubi, Meir Wilner, and Emile Habibi, and calling itself the New Communist party, represented the majority of Arabs and a few Jews. In fact, the breach resulted from issues involving Jewish-Arab identity and feelings. The Mikunis-Sneh group has stressed concern with Israel's national survival despite heavy criticism of the government in both domestic and foreign relations, while the New Communists strongly championed Arab nationalism and interests in the Middle East.¹³ The fact that the Communists, with their historical stress on doctrine, purposeful membership, and tight-knit organizational structure and discipline, were not able to hold the two groups together bodes ill for Jewish-Arab co-operation on the larger Israeli political scene.

Without question the 1965 Knesset election results represented a striking victory for the Mapai-Achdut-Haavoda Alignment, which won forty-five seats plus four positions for Mapai's satellite Arab lists. While the combined tally for these groups was fifty-four in the elections to the Fifth Knesset in 1961, it had been expected that Ben-Gurion-Rafi forces would emerge with from fifteen to twenty seats; their total of ten could be interpreted only as a very distinct defeat for Rafi.

Another electoral loser was the Herut-Liberal bloc (Gahal), which was the second strongest group in the Fifth Knesset and which had offered itself as a serious alternative to the Mapai-Achdut-Haavoda Alignment and had been somewhat encouraged by the September, 1965, Histadrut election. Gahal not only did not make its widely expected advance, but actually lost a seat. The more strident echoes of Herut's earlier years had been softened (as in the 1961 Knesset election), although Labor party opponents, with some apparent success, had continued to dredge up the past and to warn darkly of a combination between big business and right-wing extremism.¹⁴

On the left the New Communists emerged with the lion's share of the total Communist vote. With slightly double the

number of ballots polled by the Mikunis-Sneh group, they received, through the mechanics of proportional representation, a three-to-one margin in actual Knesset seats. The combined Communist vote declined, with a loss of one seat from the previous election; and the doctrinaire Marxian socialist party Mapam lost one of its mandates in the face of Mapai-Achdut-Haavoda Alignment success.

As far as the religious parties were concerned, only a slight shift took place, total Knesset representation declining by one seat to seventeen. This loss was incurred by the National Religious party, whose strength has varied by only two seats in the six Knesset elections that have taken place. It should be noted that the National Religious party was laboring under considerable pressure, both internal and external, stemming from a bribery case involving one of its leading members. Considering this development and the intensive efforts made by Mapai-Achdut-Haavoda and Premier Eshkol to rally independent support against Ben-Gurion and Rafi, it is a testimony to the tenacity of the National Religious party's organizers and workers that it did not suffer greater loss.¹⁶

Another electoral shift of a somewhat modest nature may be noted. It will be recalled that a group of Liberals refused to accept the alignment with Herut (Gahal) and established themselves as the Independent Liberals. This was, in effect, a re-establishment of the old Progressive party which had merged with the free-enterprise General Zionists in 1961 to form the Liberal party. The Independent Liberals carried five seats in the 1965 election. While this was a loss of two seats from the Independent Liberals' strength in the last months of the Fifth Knesset following their break over Gahal, it was a reasonably accurate reflection of the group's strength in the first four Knessets under the Progressive label.

The only other change in Knesset representation was the appearance of a new political entity called Haolam Hazeh (This World), which is the personal vehicle for one Uri Avneri, the editor of a sensationalist weekly journal. Avneri's election was an interesting testimony to a restless disaffection with existing parties among younger urban voters, particularly in Tel Aviv, and to a

campaign which included a shrewd combination of sensationalism, anti-clericism, and elements of chauvinism.

An over-all examination of the 1965 campaign results indicates the following major points: The unexpectedly strong showing of Mapai-Achdut-Haavoda was both something of an endorsement of the status quo and of Eshkol and the Alignment, and also a sharp rebuke to the personalism of Ben-Gurion and his defiance of majority decisions within Mapai. It also reflected Alignment success on the other political flank in convincing substantial numbers of voters that there was a real threat of an anti-labor government materializing from the Gahal combination and that electoral gains for Gahal and Rafi would produce a situation in which no stable cabinet could be formed. The "Citizens for Eshkol" movement which had been formed of intellectuals, businessmen, and former army officers published impressively long lists of distinguished names; through numerous meetings around the country this movement publicized the threatened parliamentary chaos and drew some supporters from normal adherents of such parties as Mapam, the Independent Liberals, and the National Religious party. While other leaders of Rafi did not emphasize the Lavon Affair, Ben-Gurion continued to demand a judicial investigation of the affair and to make strong personal attacks on Eshkol. The election results justify the conclusion that the general public has had enough of the Lavon Affair.

The 1965 electoral return reflected a general lack of change among the various competing political forces. Including Rafi yet within the labor camp, the labor parties increased their total standing by four mandates over the Fifth Knesset; the Gahal combination lost one seat, as was the case for the religious parties. Even in the face of internal difficulties, an impressive degree of flexibility and resilience was shown by parties and their managers. Mapai continued to demonstrate a successful pattern of accommodation to disruptive events, particularly when both Mapai's related kibbutz (collective) and moshav (co-operative) movements successfully weathered the Mapai-Rafi battle under conditions that preserved their organizational viability and at the same time allowed both competing parties to function under political ground rules which were satisfactory or tolerable to both sides.¹⁴

In sum, it would appear that long-range features of electoral and organizational strength were unchanged, with one observer noting that "the curious feature of the 1965 election was that, despite all the commotion, there seemed nothing particularly curious about the result."¹⁷

If the 1965 election results were unexceptional when compared with past contests, the new cabinet which was presented in January, 1966, was also within the previous pattern of Israeli politics. The Mapai-Achdut-Haavoda Alignment formed the core of the new cabinet, including the major posts of Premier, Defense, the Foreign Ministry, and the Treasury. The Independent Liberals resumed the role the Progressives had played before the formation of the Liberal party in 1961 had challenged their position. Mapam also returned to the government ranks a position it had abandoned in 1961 over the Lavon Affair. The National Religious party and Poalei Agudat (Workers of the Association of Israel) returned to their accustomed positions after the usual hard bargaining that always distinguishes their demands for governmental protection of Orthodox interests in the country.

A potentially important change did take place in the Eshkol cabinet of 1966 with Mapai's loss of an absolute majority, a majority it had maintained in all cabinets since statehood. While the Alignment obtained twelve seats in the new eighteen-man cabinet, three of them represented Achdut-Haavoda, leaving Mapai with a bare 50 per cent of the total. If the Alignment develops into an organic union, or, short of that, if its two constituent although unequal parties continue to agree on common principles (there are several items, including relations with West Germany, on which independent action is authorized in the original papers of agreement), this new position for Mapai presumably will not be too serious in its implications. If, however, the alignment partners disagree on issues (such as threatened to be the case with wage and economic policies), a more serious prospect is presented. Over the years Mapai has taken collective cabinet discipline to be very important, and its automatic cabinet majorities heretofore have given it a strong position vis-à-vis its coalition partners.

Developments related to the 1965 campaign and its conse-

quences have continued to be felt. It is not possible here to catalog such developments or to present a running account of them. One, however, does stand out in its apparent significance within the party in question as well as in its impact upon the larger system. It is the unexpected resignation of Herut party leader Menachem Beigin at the party's national convention in June, 1966, and the internal dissension in Herut that has existed since. In an emotional speech the former Irgun commander, the most influential party founder and an undisputed national and parliamentary leader, announced his resignation after convention activities which had seen mounting attacks and even personal criticism of him from various elements. The mounting opposition within Herut stemmed from a combination of developments which cannot be dealt with in detail in this study. The failure, over a series of campaigns, to find some kind of an approach or formula that would bring Herut out of political opposition into governmental power was obviously of importance. There was also a growing restlessness within various elements of the party, including younger delegates who chafed over the continuing domination of Herut by Beigin and a group of former Irgun men around him, and disaffected members of Herut's National Labor Federation who still smarted under a 1963 party decision to establish an official Histadrut faction. Beigin's resignation appears to have been an action contemplated for some time rather than just a spur-of-the-moment decision by a man who had been goaded beyond endurance by critics in and outside the party.¹⁸ Nevertheless his resignation was a sensation, and its significance within Israeli politics was profound, even after his return to formal leadership in February, 1967.¹⁹ It graphically illustrates the restlessness and disaffection on the part of younger elements not only within Herut but within the general body politic with the continuing pre-eminence, if not domination, of the older generation of leadership which has been in the driver's seat since before statehood. It is this widespread sense of restlessness and disaffection, along with the events and developments of the last several years, that has brought forth so many predictions and expectations of far-reaching change in the party system, both in personnel and in the form and content of party politics.

It is now appropriate to classify systematically and examine the trends and developments in Israeli politics to see what they portend for the whole system in the years ahead.

III

PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE

Evidences of the beginning of a new era in Israeli party politics include the following:

1. *The breakaway from Mapai of Ben-Gurion and his associates and the formation of Rafi.* The importance of this event would seem to be self-evident. This split in Israel's one major party is the first such development of any magnitude during the period of statehood.²⁰ Perhaps even more important was the role that Ben-Gurion played in this event, for his membership had always been a great asset to Mapai in previous electoral contests.

2. *The rejection of Ben-Gurion and Rafi in the 1965 Knesset election.* Even more drastic than the step of breaking with the party he had helped found and had led for more than three decades was the electoral defeat of Rafi. Ben-Gurion's two previous withdrawals from political leadership had been voluntary; the 1965 election results were very much the contrary.

3. *Mapai's loss of majority control of the Histadrut and its acceptance of equality with its coalition partners in the cabinet.* While both of these developments have been mitigated somewhat by the Alignment with Achdut-Haavoda, that political combination does not offer anything like the sure control a one-party majority in those vital bodies offered. Indeed, in the Histadrut the Alignment's bare 50.8 per cent margin includes the explicit proviso that Achdut-Haavoda will retain considerable autonomy, and in the cabinet a number of areas are exempt from the agreement, quite apart from the constant danger of disagreement and splitting on various issues, particularly in the economic realm.

4. *Party bloc formations and party splits on a scale that distinguishes the last several years from previous Israeli political history.* The creation of the Alignment (Maarach) between Mapai and Achdut-Haavoda and the Gahal arrangement of Herut and

the Liberals are events of top importance on the political scene and evidence a movement toward larger political groupings within the multi-party system, despite shifts in the other direction as seen in the creation of Rafi and the Independent Liberals (a re-establishment in fact of an earlier party) and the splitting of the Communists into two separate groups.

5. *Increasing restiveness in parties and the country over the older generation's continuing hegemony over party leadership.* In all of the Zionist parties leadership has been controlled by a generation of founding fathers who immigrated from Europe during the earlier decades of this century. The pressures of time and age are being accentuated by growing dissatisfaction on the part of younger generations who have been born and raised in Palestine-Israel and, more recently, by Oriental Jewish immigrants and their offspring. To these growing groups the slogans and exhortations of the old leaders are less and less meaningful, and even downright irrelevant. This ferment is seen in the creation of Rafi (despite the apparent anomaly of Ben-Gurion's leadership) and the activity of politicians like former Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan and Shimon Peres, who served so ably for many years as Ben-Gurion's Deputy Minister of Defense. Menachem Beigin's more recent difficulties in Herut are also part of this pattern.

6. *Widespread expectations of change in the political system in the number of parties, their composition and leadership, and their capacity to deal with contemporary economic and social problems.* Expectations of change, when widely held within the general public and by informed observers and active party members, represent the generating of at least some pressure for the fulfillment of the expectations themselves. That such feelings are widespread within present-day Israel cannot be doubted by any observer who has been in contact with working politicians and political commentators.

7. *Reverberations within Israeli politics and society from the events and consequences of the summer, 1967, Israeli-Arab war.* The stunning defeat of the Arab armies is manifestly a major milestone in the history of the state, and constitutes an important force for change and for the advancement of younger forces

within the Israeli body politic. The prominent role of Moshe Dayan as Minister of Defense is illustrative of this development.

There are a series of factors present in the Israeli political scene which are associated with political change, but which can be termed *contingent variables*, inasmuch as the actual course the political events and developments may take is not readily predictable. These events and developments may be expected to determine the direction of political change. Such contingent variables are:

1. *The success or failure of Premier Levi Eshkol in the years immediately ahead.* Prospects of strength and effectiveness suggested by Eshkol's handling of the challenge of Ben-Gurion and Rafi in 1965 seemingly were not borne out by the events of the following year. Considering the magnitude of the problems faced in the realm of economic and social affairs, some sense of letdown and general public disaffection after the excitement of the election year and campaign promises is not surprising. Nevertheless, Eshkol's performance still seemed disappointing. His skill in government fiscal management and in political patch-and-fix operations are not the equivalent of Ben-Gurion's strong and decisive national leadership. Foreign policy reversals or crises and military problems with the surrounding Arab states could also bring about the end of the Eshkol premiership. If he should relinquish the premiership in the foreseeable future, it would remove a roadblock to the return of Ben-Gurion and Rafi to the ranks of Mapai, an event which before the 1967 war appeared to be unlikely as long as Eshkol continued in office.

2. *Leadership factors in Rafi, including the question of Ben-Gurion's role, as well as that of Moshe Dayan and Shimon Peres.* As a corollary to the above observations on Eshkol and prospects for union of Rafi with the Mapai Achdut-Haavoda Alignment, leadership factors in Rafi are an important contingent variable. A continuing major role for Ben-Gurion would militate against a combination with the Alignment, but the impact and reverberations of the 1967 war and the increasing standing of Dayan in Rafi and the country tended to shift matters toward a merger of the parties. Opinion in Rafi in 1966-1967, however, had clearly

been mixed on the question of rejoining Mapai.²¹ The future influence of Dayan and Peres within the body politic is obviously a matter of great and increasing importance.²²

3. *The outcome of the leadership issue in Herut, and the general future success of the Gahal combination.* While the 1960 convention did not produce the answer to the question of future control of the party, the older ex-Irgun leadership associated with Beigin strengthened its position in various party organs in the fall and winter of 1966-1967. Beigin's return to party leadership in February, 1967, was accompanied by a bolt from Herut of three of its Knesset members and a companion move in the party's faction within the trade union federation, the Histadrut. The bitter intraparty feuding that preceded this split boded ill in some respects for both Herut and Gahal. Internal stability or lack thereof in Herut obviously will be important to the future of Gahal as perceived by both Herut and the Liberals as well as in the calculations of political practitioners in rival parties.

4. *The success of the Alignment between Mapai and Achdut-Haavoda.* The Alignment has already been dealt with as a significant factor of change in the Israeli body politic and as evidence of a new political era. It is important to keep in mind, however, that there are important centrifugal forces at work within Maarach, as there were in the early 1940's when "Faction B" split away from the larger Mapai and became Achdut-Haavoda. Somewhat differing experiences in historical development, leadership elites, and institutional groups with positions to preserve, and some contrasting stands on issues are all points of importance which continue to exist and which are conducive to internal strains in the Alignment. Following the 1967 war, prospects, however, improved for a full merger of Mapai, Achdut-Haavoda, and Rafi, with a final decision expected that fall.²³

Despite the rather substantial number of factors that suggest the inauguration of a new era in Israeli party politics, there are a number of important considerations which ought to give pause to confident predictions of the advent of such an era. These points can be termed factors working toward a system-maintenance pattern in the structure, style, and content of Israeli politics:

1. *The sense of disaffection with many aspects of existing party politics, particularly on the part of the younger generation, has been a feature of Israeli politics for most of the period of statehood without resulting in any striking transformation of the system.* One can point to public comment and analytical articles on this subject dating back at least into the early and middle 1950's, when a group designated as "Young Mapai" including Dayan, Peres, Abba Eban, and others came on the scene.²⁴ While it is arguable that there has been an increase in the amount of this disaffection and restlessness with the older order of parties, leaders, and programs, it is frankly doubtful that the development has been as pronounced as some have thought or that as much will come of it as is usually claimed. A case in point is the Oriental Jewish immigrants and their children. A succession of commentators, including this writer, have called attention to the increasing number of these people, who, it will be recalled, now constitute a majority of the Jewish population of the state. Oriental "communal" lists have been on the ballot over a succession of Knesset elections, but their lack of success has been accompanied by the continuing slowness of all the parties to incorporate Oriental Jews into leadership positions in general and positions on party Knesset slates which have some realistic chance of election.²⁵ A number of evidences suggest that, apart from the slowness of the Ashkenazim-European leadership to push members of the Oriental Jewish communities more rapidly to the fore (an action which may be asking a great deal of them in terms of power and perquisites), the Oriental communities and families do not show great promise, in their social and educational patterns, of advancing rapidly under their own impetus in a variety of fields of which politics is only one.²⁶

2. *Existing institutional political arrangements contribute to a system-maintenance pattern even beyond that which would be reasonably expected in a mature democratic party system.* The highly organized structure and pattern of party activities in economic and social affairs, party control of news media, the religious parties' educational systems, and party membership activities have been touched upon earlier in this study and in

other articles by the author, who noted also a weakening hold of parties in those respects in major urban centers, particularly Tel Aviv.²⁷ To note that there is some weakening in the pattern, however, is not to suggest that party influences and controls over the electorate are not matters of considerable importance for some years and perhaps decades ahead. Anybody who has witnessed Israeli party activities in an election period, and particularly on election day itself, cannot help but be impressed with the strength of party influence, and reports on the 1965 Knesset election indicated a continuation of the pattern.

The ability of Israeli parties to maintain, through work and services among the citizenry, their respective positions of strength under circumstances of major social change is well attested to, although there is a tendency to forget or ignore the pattern of the previous decades and to assume that the present situation is unique. In the period of statehood the Jewish population of Israel has more than tripled; communities have boomed; and a host of new towns have sprung up. In the face of these and other striking developments, the truly impressive political fact of life has been the stability of political forms, and comparatively speaking, the remarkable success of most of the parties in maintaining long-standing electoral strength. Party institutional and organizational factors are of major importance in this respect, as is the electoral system of proportional representation.

These final considerations are not being advanced as support for the conclusion that little if any real change has taken place or is about to. The previously discussed developments of the past few years are of substantial importance. It should be emphasized, however, that the older institutional and organizational features probably have greater strength and resilience than is frequently recognized, and that there is a great deal of salutary inertia, seen in voter habits and attitudes that are not easily swept away, in this mature and successful democratic system. Although there are important contingent variables, including the events and consequences of the 1967 summer war, that are likely to shift or accelerate trends and developments into the "new era" of Israeli politics, it should not be too surprising if several years pass before important changes in the form and content of the political system fully take place.

NOTES

1. Scott D. Johnston, "Election Politics and Social Change in Israel," *Middle East Journal*, XVI (Summer 1962), p. 326.

2. For a further discussion of Mapai in historical development and its role in the system, see Scott D. Johnston, "Major Party Politics in a Multi-Party System: The Mapai Party of Israel," *Il Politico* (University of Pavia), XXX (1965), 331-347.

3. The subject of internal factional groups and their importance is examined in Scott D. Johnston, "A Comparative Study of Intra-Party Factionalism in Israel and Japan," *Western Political Quarterly*, XX (June 1967).

4. Ben-Gurion is eighty, Premier Eshkol is seventy-one, and former Premier Sharett was seventy-two at the time of his death in 1965; President Zalman Shazar is in his seventy-eighth year. Similar examples can be cited from other parties, although most of the active party leadership in Israel is somewhat younger. The Communists, with the advancement of younger personnel into party posts through a turbulent party history that has lent itself to this process, can be classed as a partial exception to this general observation on older leadership. The right Herut party (Freedom Movement) has also had a comparatively younger leadership elite stemming from its origins in the Irgun Zvai Leumi. When Menachem Beigin resigned the party chairmanship in the summer of 1966, he was only fifty-two years of age, although he had spent eighteen years in party leadership.

5. Sylvia Kowitz, "The Influence of the Military Establishment on Israeli Politics" (Master's thesis, Columbia University, 1961), pp. 60-61.

6. Kowitz has commented on "the vast measures which curb individual rights under the cloak of national security," and that "secrecy and a nightmare of espionage hang over not only military activities and scientific research but much of private industry as well" (p. 66). She continues in this vein, asserting that "the huge and mighty defense machine is becoming a self-contained state within a state hidden from public scrutiny. A few top commanders are able to decide questions of life and death for the whole community without consultation, participation, or ratification by representatives of the State" (p. 69). These observations seem to this writer to be overdrawn. Kowitz is reasonably optimistic about the future of Israeli civil democracy, interestingly enough in the light of the above observations, looking to former top military figures like former Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan and younger state administrators to serve as the corps for future political leaders.

7. The Lavon Affair had its origins in a "security disaster" back in 1954 during the tenure of leading Mapai figure, Pinhas Lavon, in the vital Defense Ministry, which had otherwise been headed by Ben-Gurion. It was necessary for Lavon to leave the post of Minister of Defense. In the fall of 1960 the issue was suddenly raised again by Lavon, who now occupied the extremely important position of Secretary-General of the Histadrut. He also raised other charges in connection with the case. After a series of investigations and re-

ports, and amidst the crash of political crockery within the ranks of Mapai, Ben-Gurion forced Lavon's resignation from his Histadrut office, over the protests of other parties also involved in the management of the labor federation. The 1961 election was a direct result of the Affair, which also played a part in the 1965 campaign, incomprehensible as this seems to most outside observers.

8. Nadav Safran, *The United States and Israel* (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 200-201.

9. Scott D. Johnston, "Party Politics and Coalition Cabinets in the Knesset of Israel," *Middle Eastern Affairs*, XIII (May 1962), p. 138.

10. For a detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see Johnston, "A Comparative Study of Intra-Party Factionalism in Israel and Japan."

11. Through 1966 the arrangement worked reasonably well, although one of the principle leaders of Gahal has acknowledged that joint cooperation in local councils had presented problems (interview with Dr. Eilmelich Rimalt, member of the Knesset Gahal [Liberal], July 12, 1966). The two parties agreed to take separate lines on a number of points such as German relations, whether the armistice with the Arab states should be made into a permanent peace arrangement, and electoral reform for Knesset elections. Agreement was reached on a range of economic and social issues, emphasizing a more conservative free enterprise approach to the nation's problems, in contrast to the labor-socialist parties.

12. The contrast in styles and development of the two parties over the years perhaps was illustrated at the ceremonies attending the formal signing of the papers bringing the alignment (*Maarach*) into existence. At the singing of the "Internationale," it became apparent that many members of Mapai no longer knew many of the words, while others were apparently ill at ease or embarrassed in singing it.

13. The two parties, of course, represent their differences in contrasting explanations. The Mikunis-Sneh group condemns the New Communists, who "abandoned the principles of proletarian internationalism and regressed into Arab nationalism, on the one hand, and Jewish nihilism on the other" ("Political Resolutions Adopted at the 15th Congress of the Communist Party of Israel" [August 4-7, 1965], *Information Bulletin of the Communist Party of Israel* [October 1965], p. 21). Dr. Sneh explains the split within the context of changes in the international Communist movement, stressing greater autonomy for national parties, developments in Arab nationalism (particularly after Algerian Communists joined the F.L.N. in that country), and internal changes in Israel associated with "the collapse of the Ben-Gurion regime" and supposed increased opportunities for labor forces in Israel to "reconciliate" (interview with Dr. Moshe Sneh, editor of *Kol Haam*, July 17, 1966).

Emile Habibi, a member of the Knesset for the New Communists, and Hans Lebrecht, party journalist and member of the Central Control Committee for that party present matters in a different light. They maintain that almost half of their party members are Jewish, an observation not concurred

in by other observers or by evidence of voter support in the 1965 election. In 1966 the New Communists were still publishing weekly newspapers in Yiddish and Bulgarian, along with an Arab biweekly and a Rumanian monthly. The party is said to support the 1947 United Nations partition plan for Palestine. It looks with favor on the "progressive tendencies" of the present Syrian regime, and the "progressive regime" in Egypt, claiming that the greater strength of such forces in the Middle East will be conducive to ultimate Israeli-Arab peace (although it is acknowledged that those forces are not yet moving toward such a settlement). Habibi asserts that the Mikunis-Sueh group differs from the New Communists in not encouraging Arab "progressive" forces as long as anti-Israeli attitudes persist (interview with Emile Habibi, member of the Knesset, New Communist Party, and Hans Lebrecht, member of the Central Control Committee, New Communist Party, July 12, 1966). Both parties claimed ties with Moscow.

14. Charges against Herut concerning right extremist, or even "neo-fascistic," tendencies have more to do with some aspects of Herut's earlier historical background in the Zionist Revisionist Movement and the paramilitary underground force, the Irgun Zvai Leumi, and to convenient exigencies of campaign politics by opposition parties, particularly those of a labor-socialist orientation. In fact Herut has come to be substantially within the mainstream of Israeli politics, particularly in Knesset affairs, and more recently in the Histadrut. For a more detailed discussion of Herut, see Scott D. Johnston, "Politics of the Right in Israel: The Herut Movement," *Social Science*, XL (April 1965), 104-114.

15. One knowledgeable member and former secretary-general of an affiliated world organization of the National Religious Party has observed that not only did the bribery affair hurt the party, but that some of its people were stirred by "Fihudsklim" in the political actions of Ben-Gurion, and were willing to give vote support to "Citizens for Eahkol" efforts (interview with Israel Gan Zvi, former Secretary-General of the World Organization of Hapoel Hamizrachi and member of the National Religious Party, July 16, 1966).

16. Although Rafi support among rank and file members was weaker in Ihud Hakvutzot Vehakibbutzim, the great kibbutz federation associated with Mapai, than in other sections of Mapai, one headquarters officer of the kibbutz movement has referred to the first impact of Rafi as "something of a horror." The "horror," however, was more exaggerated expectation than what actually developed. Immediate and successful efforts were made by federation leaders to try to neutralize the party split in order to preserve Ihud Hakvutzot Vehakibbutzim. Such efforts basically succeeded, although tensions were clearly felt in individual settlements where Rafi had greater strength than was generally the case. The federation acknowledged and sanctioned Rafi activity as legitimate and allowed certain officers to work for Rafi if they wished. Ihud Hakvutzot Vehakibbutzim made an official financial contribution to Mapai, whereas in individual kibbutzim contributions were assigned on a "key"

basis to Mapai and Rafi (interview with Josef Schaefer, headquarters officer for Committee on Social Affairs, Ihud Hakvutnot Vehakibbutzim, July 14, 1966. Mr. Schaefer is a member of Mapai).

A somewhat comparable situation prevailed in Tnuat Hamoshavim, the colossus that dominates the national field among cooperative agricultural settlements. Before the Rafi split Mapai completely dominated the organizational affairs of Tnuat Hamoshavim, although it had a somewhat smaller majority among rank and file members than in the kibbutz federation. In the election campaign, in contrast to all earlier campaigns, the central headquarters of Tnuat Hamoshavim in Tel Aviv was not used politically, although most of the headquarters personnel stayed with Mapai. Financial aid for election purposes was given by individuals and not moshavim units, with a few exceptions. At the 1966 convention of Tnuat Hamoshavim it was decided to shift greater emphasis away from party concerns, and delegates were elected on a non-party basis, in contrast to earlier years, when it was felt that it was the responsibility and function of the movement to be available for Mapai party purposes (interview with Ben Ami Harel, Director for Economic Planning in Tnuat Hamoshavim, and a Rafi member, July 14, 1966).

17. Moshe Bar Natan, "Eshkol's Triumph," *Jewish Frontier* (December 1965), p. 4. Another observer commented: "The vote in Israel was for old loyalties rather than new promises" (Amos Ben-Vered, "Public Distrust of Promises: No Alternative to Labour," *Jewish Observer and Middle East Review* [November 12, 1965], p. 5).

18. One Herut party leader who has been a close friend of Beigin back to boyhood days in Poland informed the writer that he had tried to argue Beigin out of his decision to resign, as he had done successfully on a number of previous occasions when the Herut leader had seriously contemplated such action (interview with Eliahu Meridor, member of the Knesset, Herut, July 18, 1966). There is something of a tendency for older party officers to deprecate or deny the fact of a struggle between younger-generation forces and older ex-Irgun personnel at the 1966 Herut convention.

19. One younger delegate at the 1966 Herut convention was reported to have remarked: "We only came to shake up some dust, and just look, we've brought down the roof" (Mark Segal, "Herut Brings Down the Roof," *Jerusalem Post* [July 8, 1966], p. 9).

20. A group coalescing around Pinhas Lavon and protesting his treatment by Ben-Gurion and Mapai in 1961 formed a faction known as Min Hayesod (From the Roots) which finally withdrew from the party. This group is for practical purposes dead, and many of its members have quietly returned to Mapai. It will be recalled that in the 1940's the forces that became Achdut Haavoda and had been known by the name "Faction B" in Mapai councils seceded from the larger party.

21. There are noticeable variations with Rafi on the future role and direction of the party which are tied into personal backgrounds and associations. For instance, within the headquarters personnel of Tnuat Hamoshavim

a majority of the Rafi people are said to favor reunion with Mapai (interview, Ben Ami Harel). Perception of what Rafi represents varies considerably outside the party. Meir Yaari, the ideological leader of Mapam, still regards Rafi as a labor party. The party secretary of the smallest of the religious parties, Poalei Agudat, sees no theoretical differences between Mapai and Rafi, and informed the author that he hoped for their reunion (interview with Avraham Werdiger, Secretary-General of Poalei Agudat, July 17, 1966).

22. Peres is more the accomplished politician, while Dayan is something of a lone wolf, and despite some popular appeal, lacking in warmth and more brusque in his dealings with those who do not measure up to his own high standards of excellence. Both Peres and Dayan are modern "practicals" to whom the older Zionist-labor ideology has less relevance in the face of contemporary problems.

23. One officer of Achdut Haavoda expressed to the author that the position of the Alignment, into the summer of 1966, had been 51 per cent positive (for example, supporting stable government of the Histadrut) and 49 per cent negative (Achdut Haavoda wants higher wages for workers, in contrast to Mapai, which favors anti-inflation controls and overall stability for the economy; there are nuances of difference in foreign affairs, differing emphases upon public and private sectors of the economy, and so forth). Achdut Haavoda regards the incorporation of Mapam into the Alignment as a matter of high priority (interview with Zar Perlman, General-Secretary of the Youth Organization of Achdut Haavoda, July 17, 1966).

24. See "Shake-Up in Mapai," *Israel Economist* (June 1956), p. 109; Ben Halpern, "Young Mapai," *Jewish Frontier* (March 1962), p. 40; and the satirical essay by Ephraim Kishon, "Youth to the Fore," *Jerusalem Post* (September 21, 1960), p. 9.

25. In the 1959 Knesset election, following some communal demonstrations, a number of the parties, including particularly Mapai, made an effort to incorporate "new blood," including some Oriental Jewish representation, on their respective tickets. The 1961 and 1965 Knesset elections have not been notable in terms of a continuation of this pattern. Because of differing conditions in individual municipalities, more attention must be given to such matters by the parties in local elections.

26. The government is concerned about the school drop-out rate for Oriental children, which is much higher than that for children from Ashkenazim families. The contrast between Ashkenazim and Oriental Jews along these lines is particularly striking at the university level. In some municipalities the government is engaged in a type of "headstart" operation for culturally disadvantaged children which was initiated before "Headstart" operations in the United States.

27. Johnston, "Election Politics and Social Change in Israel," pp. 317-318, 323-326.