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## GETTING THEIR ACT TOGETHER

DURING THE past three days, party activists and other experts – that is the rest of us – will have calculated all the possible combinations of Knesset mandates. Maybe by then we shall be able to guess who is going to form a government.

If it turns out to be the Alignment, its government will probably have a more stable look: its list of potential partners is longer than that of the Likud. Not only can Shinui (Amnon Rubinstein), CRM (Shulamit Aloni) and Yahad (Ezer Weizman) be regarded as certain collaborators, but both Rakah and the new Progressive List for Peace will give it parliamentary support against the Likud. It will be able to open negotiations with 59 anti-Likud seats actively “secured.”

The Likud, on the other hand, has only the Tehiya to count on as a party that will under no circumstances support the Alignment. The Likud/Tehiya can approach the religious parties with only 46 votes in hand. While its leaders are optimistic about the response of the parties, who all voice a preference for the Likud, the fact is that none of them has expressed opposition in principle to joining with the Alignment. There would of course be conditions . . .

WHAT EMERGES, from the point of view of the nation and the national interests – what has indeed emerged – since the first “exit-poll” of television on Monday night, is that all the coalition ills and the repeated paralytic strokes that have plagued the Likud government since 1981 will continue to afflict a new coalition government. The economic shake-up, requiring drastic measures with resultant discomfort for the people, will need considerable skill, single-mindedness, determination and courage. There are, to put it mildly, not enough of these qualities in either of the coalitions that could emerge from this week’s election.

The Likud, having in mind the grim economic condition of the state, has indeed proposed the formation of a national unity government. The Alignment has so far officially turned this proposal down out of hand, claiming that such a government would be paralysed by its internal differences. It has insisted on an Alignment victory and the pursuit of an unadulterated Alignment policy. The electorate, however, has not given the Alignment such a mandate; and if it does succeed in forming a government it will be able to command a majority in the Knesset only by satisfying the demands of the confederation of interests which sustain it.

Commonsense, the facts of life, then, carry an unequivocal message to the Alignment – and if a poll were conducted this week the population at large would undoubtedly underwrite it: swallow your party pride, as the Likud has already done, and join with the Likud in carrying through an economic programme to put the country on its feet. There is little difference between the two parties as to the steps essential for that consummation.

MR. PERES, in rejecting outright the idea of a national unity government, was manifestly seized with the diametrically opposite policies of the two camps on the subject of settling Judea, Samaria and Gaza.

The differences on this issue are indeed not capable of solution by any doctrinal formula as long as the Alignment not only insists that a “territorial compromise” is desirable but pretends that it is feasible. On the mystical assumption that Hussein would negotiate on, and accept, Israel’s retaining sovereign possession of about one-third of Judea and Samaria (including united Jerusalem) the Alignment has “promised” to freeze settlement activity unilaterally.

Now however Mr. Peres and his colleagues must face the reality that has emerged from the election. The Alignment, long before the election, launched and maintained a heavy barrage of propaganda against the settlement policy. Meeting a growing preponderance of political support for the Jewish presence in the areas, it began to bombard a sorely troubled people with the absurdly untruthful proposition that the establishment of settlement in Judea, Samaria and Gaza is a major factor in Israel’s economic malaise. The net expenditure on these settlements, by all authoritative analyses, amounts to about one per cent of the national budget.

But if all the charges in Alignment propaganda were added up it would appear that if only there was not expenditure on settlement Israel would be rolling in surplus cash. Indeed just about everybody in Israel with a complaint or grievance, personal or collective, has been assured by the Likud’s critics, in the Alignment or its satellites, that the settlements were to blame.

The implied economic damage to the nation certainly soured many people against the settlement policy. In spite of this, the parties responsible for the policy have in this election held their ground. The Alignment has certainly not been given a mandate by the electorate to “freeze” the settlements.

It is inconceivable then that the religious parties, when approached by the Alignment to join a coalition, will agree to such a freezing policy. At the least they will insist on a formula to keep in existence the settlement process.

If, in mutual understanding, no final options are foreclosed there should be no insuperable difficulty in evolving such a formula; and Mr. Peres and his colleagues can surely, for a while, give up the pretence that King Hussein is waiting, all agog, to start discussing a “territorial compromise” with them.

Why then should they not put forward such a formula to the Likud – for a government of national unity? Such a government could be set up for a defined period, adequate for the deep revision of economic policy. Indeed during that period the problem of settlements as a whole could be examined and debated in tranquility within the government. At the end of that period – a new election could be held, in what could be a much more relaxed atmosphere.

THE INDECISIVE election has once more exposed a root cause of our present disarray: the intolerable shortcomings of Israel’s electoral system. Proportional representation was essential in the early days of the state. With the tremendous increase in population – it was doubled in about three years – and in its cultural diversity, it seemed only fair that every possible nuance should find expression in parliament.

Those days are long past; and with the integration and comparative “stabilization” of Israeli society, all the possible ills and disadvantages of proportional representation (not to mention famous Jewish factionalism) have become a heavy burden on our democracy. For some years the two main streams of political thought have maintained a state of near parity, making each of them when in power dependent on small, politically “flexible” groups. The will of the people is thus distorted and the very fabric of our institutions weakened. This development was demonstrated in all its crudity in the outgoing Knesset.

Last Monday’s post-election night must have brought home to the public, glued as they were in agonized bewilderment to their television screens, that this was an intolerable situation; it should surely have forced on the major parties the *urgency* of electoral reform.

Ironically, both major parties have long had plans in their files for such reform. They have always bowed to the ultimate demand of the smaller parties – and shelved them. It is the failure of the big parties to cooperate on a crucial issue on which they are agreed that has allowed the democratic process in Israel to reach its present degree of absurdity – and indeed danger.

There are of course various proposals for reform. The simplest is the raising of the threshold of admissibility to the Knesset from one per cent to three or five. Another is the adoption of some variant of the constituency system. Mr. Gad Ya’acobi of the Labour Party has proposed a plan whereby three-quarters of the Knesset would be elected in constituencies and one-quarter from a national list.

THE DEVELOPMENT of techniques presents no serious problem. The main lesson of the 1984 elections is that the political leaders of the nation should find the courage and the humility to act in concert for the elimination of at least the burning woes of our society – even if this requires the shelving of immediate party interests.