

June 25, 1993

NATIONAL CONSENSUS VS. THE CON MEN

LAST Monday, President Ezer Weizman paid an official visit to Jewish communities across the "Green Line." It was an elegant gesture, and he emphasized it by decrying the nasty habit of so many on the "left" - behaving toward the "settlers" as though they were criminals. However, he also had a political item on his agenda. He appealed to the people - of Gush Etzion - not to do anything that could bring about a schism in the nation.

It is surely not the citizens of Gush Etzion to whom such an appeal should first be addressed. In fact the president, maybe unwittingly, was thereby promoting the Rabin government's current campaign to intimidate his opponents, who are organizing mass demonstrations against the policy of concession-after-concession to the Palestinian Arabs - in retreat even from the Madrid agreement - and the offer to withdraw from the Golan Heights. One part of the government's present campaign consists precisely of assuring the nation that the die is cast, that an agreement (involving withdrawal) has already been concluded, and that therefore further opposition would be fruitless.

"Why waste your energy on demonstrations?" Police Minister Shahal told a group of Golanites. His friendly advice was followed up by Prime Minister Rabin's declaration that the negotiations had reached the "point of no return." Another argument, used by government spokesmen and Labor and Meretz party activists, is that of democracy. The government, they say, has a parliamentary majority; the minority must accept and obey its decisions.

The manifestly popular demonstrations of the opposition are harmful and, they hint, even anti-democratic. This sort of attitude may be appropriate for a Labor activist; it is not good enough for the president, who is the symbolic head of the people as a whole. There are two sides to the ongoing debates, in which heavy moral overtones are present.

The opposition claims that the Rabin government's policy is a travesty of democracy; and it is not right for the president to promote one side of the debate. By going to Gush Etzion - whose "settlers" went back there after the Six Day War to rebuild the homes from which they, as children, had been driven during the Arab aggression of 1948 - to tell them not to cause a schism, the president was clearly signaling his identification with Rabin's claim. Rabin claims bluntly that he has a parliamentary - albeit very thin - majority, and that the minority must resign itself to all the decisions he is likely to take; he ignores not only its views but the grim nightmare which his policy is causing many thousands of citizens living in the areas of planned surrender to the Arabs.

Weizmann was elected by a nation of which a clear majority in responsibly and neutrally organized polls expressed opposition to the government's giving up Judea, Samaria and Gaza, and in which an overwhelming majority of 80 to 90 percent voted against withdrawal from the Golan. He is the president of a nation which held these views before the elections to the Knesset - and this was evidently the reason why, in order to secure their votes, Rabin and his party gave them the assurance that in view of its great importance to Israel's security there would be no relinquishment of the Golan. (His speech was taped, as it happens, and his assurance has boomed across many of the recent demonstrations.)

As for Judea, Samaria and Gaza, it was also made abundantly clear that a Labor government would abide by the idea of "territorial compromise," along the lines of the Allon Plan. Came the election, and the trusting electors put Rabin into power. IT has been truthfully argued that renegeing

on pre-election promises is a well-known practice even in old-established, respectable democracies.

The Jerusalem Post, for example, in an editorial on June 22 declares that even if a government "represents a minority of the population, it has a right to negotiate without constraint. Neither former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher nor US President Bill Clinton, for instance, ever garnered a majority of the popular vote." This argument demonstrates the ever-recurrent danger of seeking a moral or political equivalence between Israel and other nations - an equivalence which does not exist. Neither Clinton nor Margaret Thatcher were given their parliamentary majority by means of a confidence trick, certainly not on an issue that can affect the very future of the country and tragedy to thousands of families.

Can a situation even be imagined in which a Thatcher would, in peacetime, give up Kent, Sussex or Norfolk and order the expulsion of a million Englishmen from their homes, after garnering that million on the strength of an assurance that she was going to do nothing of the sort? After all, that is precisely what has happened here. Rabin's assurance to the people on the Golan meant that they would be able to go on living, working, bringing up families, seeing their children thriving, sturdy and happy. Now the Rabin government has brought down a trauma upon the people of the Golan and, indeed, on what one can safely say is a majority of the people.

Let the question be asked: If widespread fraud is discovered in the polling at an election, is that not reason enough for a new election? And if the issues are as grave and as fateful as they are today in Israel, isn't the demand for a new election morally incontestable? The Labor Party's official platform for the Knesset election of June 1992 laid down "territorial compromise" as the basis for a peace agreement. It projected "the Jordan Valley and the north-western corner" of the Dead Sea as the desired security border of Israel, and the retention of areas not densely populated by the Arabs "like Gush Etzion and the environs of Jerusalem." "Jerusalem and its surroundings are not a political or a security issue, but the breath of life for the Jewish people. Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, will remain united under Israeli sovereignty." Then the Golan: "Israel sees in the Golan Heights an area of great importance for its security, its safety and the ensuring of its water resources, even in times of peace.

Consequently, in every peace agreement with Syria and in the security arrangements, Israel's settlements and military control will be maintained on the Heights - on which Israel's jurisdiction, law and administration have been applied." Further comment - superfluous.