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RABIN MEANS BUSINESS WITH BUSH

WHEN Chaim Weizmann in 1947 announced acceptance of partition, he made it clear that this did not signify a diminishing of the right of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel. What it did signify was a readiness on the part of the Jewish people to forgo part of that right for the sake of peace - peace, that is, which Weizmann naively believed would thus be achieved. Nor, except perhaps for the fringe groups on the "left," do the present-day proponents of a repartition of Western Eretz Yisrael suggest that Israel is not the patrimony of the Jewish people.

The ongoing public debate in Israel is not over the right of the Jewish people to their homeland, but, as was the case in Weizmann's time, about the desirability, feasibility, fairness and wisdom of offering to surrender part of the Jewish homeland against a promise of peace from the Arabs. The basic right of the Jewish people remains unshaken, unless it is formally abandoned. There has, it seems, always been one strain of surrender in the Zionist fabric, as there is in other peoples.

It was manifest here in the darkest days of the 1930s, much to the taste of the British. It was personified then by the group called Brit Shalom, led by Doctor J.L. Magnes, who may be called the grandfather of Peace Now.

While hundreds of thousands of doomed Jews were struggling to leave Eastern Europe, he promoted the idea that Jewish immigration to Eretz Yisrael should be limited to satisfy Arab demands. The strain has existed in Israel throughout its existence, and has been particularly active since the aftermath of the Six Day War as an advocate of Arab aims and as a friend of the PLO. A great poet of the founding generation of the State and prophet of the Labor movement, Nathan Alterman, gave chilling expression, in a short powerful poem, to a vision of the Devil who, pondering over the way to "overcome" Israel and unable to do so by any other means, decided to "dull the nation's mind / into forgetting that its cause / is just / and the heavens paled in terror / as they saw him set out / to execute his evil plan." That was more than 20 years ago.

Happily, nothing like the poet's vision has come to pass. Peace Now and its allies, for all their arrogant bluster and their bullying remain a small if noisy minority. Still, we have now entered the silly season of an election campaign, and it is monstrous that the national broadcasting service should spread the spirit of Peace Now.

The script of a public service advertisement by the Housing Ministry and the Council of Jewish Communities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza inviting applications for housing in those districts was rejected by the legal adviser of the Broadcasting Authority on the grounds that the text actually read: "We have a beautiful land. Come settle in the heart of the country. Join us in the center of the land." "This," said the legal adviser, "was propaganda" (and not information).

The authors of the text, no doubt in order to avoid long delays and argument, bowed to this verdict, and produced a new text. Now, reports The Jerusalem Post (April 13), "the words of the current announcement no longer include references to 'our land' " mean by this categorization (which in purely strategic terms is simply childish), its only logical significance is that he looks forward to the handing over of Samaria and much of Judea to

the Arabs, a resurrection of the "Allon Plan." According to that plan, the Jordan Valley would remain part of Israel, Jewish communities would be established there and an adequate military presence. Similarly, Jerusalem would remain part of Israel.

A corridor would link the Jordan Valley with the rest of Israel; and another would link Jordan with its Samarian province - which would be demilitarized. This patchwork was to be offered to the Arabs as a "peace plan" - consummating the Labor Party's "territorial compromise." It was indeed offered to King Hussein, not once but many times. He rejected it out of hand.

Later, as revealed by Abba Eban (the Labor foreign minister), the terms of the offer were amended: he was told he could have the territory without signifying a peace treaty, thus leaving the door open to subsequent negotiations and, presumably, further surrenders of territory. He would have none of it. (Abba Eban in Ha'ir, September 23, 1983.)

What is most amazing is the failure of the Labor leaders, in spite of all that has happened since 1948, to understand that the aim of the Arabs has remained whole and unchanged. "Israel must be eliminated." They are utterly uninterested in convoluted "interim" arrangements. Absurd as the original Allon plan was, today it looks grotesque.

Even on the face of it: Rabin knows that on the other side is not Hussein but Arafat; and Judea and Samaria are no longer a gray mass on the map. The other side of the "Green Line" is dotted all over the whole area in a network of vibrant villages and the thriving town of Ariel, based largely on a thesis of regional security, and about 120,000 Jews live there. These additional complications, however, are far from his thoughts.

His immediate objective lies elsewhere. His remarks were directed not at the Arabs, but at President Bush. An embattled Bush is surely reading the message contained in Rabin's speech.

"If he comes to power he will freeze settlements - just as I have been demanding. True, only in about 80 percent of the area. So why not make a gesture to the Jews and announce that 80 percent freeze will produce 80 percent loan guarantees? It can help Rabin win a close election.

It may - unexpectedly - be able to help me win mine. As for Jerusalem - let Rabin first get elected." This is the kind of advice which Bush is certainly being given in Washington - and, by signs and winks, from Jerusalem.