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RABIN'S THEATER OF THE ABSURD

THAT our present government is the most bizarre in Israel's colorful history can hardly be denied. A government of disparate elements, it is united only in its readiness to make concessions to its still unreconstructed enemies for the honor of being permitted to negotiate further acts of appeasement.

A prime minister, widely believed to possess an analytical mind, turns somersaults in order to contradict every statement he has made about the vital importance of the Golan Heights to Israel's security. He is prepared even to transfer Jewish residents on the Heights in exchange for a promise by the Syrian dictator to consider making peace if Israel agrees to certain further conditions. All this in the knowledge that the overwhelming majority of Israelis have not abandoned the consensual understanding that the Golan shall never again be handed over to the Arabs.

There is the minister of the interior who has been momentarily removed from office, but not from the government. His constituency is by and large opposed to the government's policy of moving toward a partition of Western Palestine. He personally, however, is on the verge of an indictment on a variety of charges relating to misuse of public funds; and may conceivably have been hoping that by demonstrating loyalty to the government he could avert the removal of his parliamentary immunity.

Then there is the minister of education (now also temporarily removed from office). For years in opposition she gave us one reason for her rejection of the idea of incorporating Judea and Samaria within Israeli sovereignty: her desire to safeguard Jewish values. No sooner had she entered on her ministerial duties than she launched a series of impetuous attacks on various elements of the Jewish religion and national heritage.

Not only are revered and important Biblical figures targets for her sarcasm and insults, but even the Holocaust and its significance have come under her sour scrutiny. She objects to organized visits by high-school pupils at the sites of the death camps in Europe - not because they might upset tender young souls, but because what they see there strengthens their national feelings as Jews, their sense of pride at the existence of their State and its army, and the determination that what happened in the Holocaust shall never happen again. (She is evidently also concerned lest such a spirit among the youth might affect her own electoral prospects in the future).

Moreover it appears that she has expressed her opinion that the Holocaust was not of specifically Jewish significance, but was only a crime of "people against people." A tasteless postscript to the Aloni pronouncements is the attempt being made by some of her friends to depict her as a heroic, liberal figure battling the dark forces of religious extremism. This is an insult to the intelligence. Aloni's remarks have offended secular people no less than the religious.

It is no secret that many voices even on her side of the political spectrum expressed disgust at her behavior. Liberalism, even in its late 20th century disfigurement, is no warrant for the arrogance, the insensitivity and contempt for other people's feelings and beliefs, or the vulgarity which have characterized Aloni's outbursts. IT is probably only

the brouhaha over the Aloni episode that has allowed another weird pronouncement by a member of Mr Rabin's team to go comparatively unnoticed: Foreign Minister Peres's statement that there is no need for a "hasbara" department - that the government's policy speaks for itself.

He is accordingly restructuring his ministry. This astonishing statement can only mean that the government is suspending even its pallid effort at enlightenment in the face of the gigantic, worldwide multi-faceted campaign of propaganda operating night and day by and for the Arabs against Israel. If he is to be understood aright, Mr Peres has - unbelievably - not realized that this campaign is not directed against any specific policy of the Israeli government.

Its fons et origo, its foundation and tremendous structure reflect the monstrous Arab purpose of denying the concept of a Jewish nation, thus denying the Jews' right to any state whatever. To this end, undeterred by the facts of history, they have built up and disseminated - with gigantic budgets and support from a variety of powerful non-Arab economic and antisemitic interests - a complete literature of lies and distortions to show that Palestine is and has always belonged to "Palestinian" Arabs, indeed to a (non-existent) "Palestinian nation." There is no need to add here that their success has been phenomenal. There is also no need to add that a substantial contribution to that success has been the failure of successive Israeli governments to grasp the elementary fact that we are faced by a propaganda war in the full sense of the term, a war no less intensive and possibly broader in scope than the Nazis' campaign against us in the 1930s.

Criticism in Israel, and the cries of despair from Jews and other friends of Israel abroad that they lack the basic tools of "hasbara," - the ammunition they could use to help spread the Zionist truth and provide timely refutation of the fictions and lies - have fallen on deaf ears in Jerusalem. Comprehensive plans - which of necessity include the establishment of a separate, strong ministry - were ignored by successive foreign ministers jealous of their own authority. The present foreign minister has, it seems, even deepened the inherent weakness of the hasbara department.

It has been authoritatively reported that instructions have been issued to Israeli diplomats abroad to treat the PLO with kid gloves. They are not to mention, it is said, the PLO "constitution," the Palestinian covenant - which calls for the dismantling of Israel and the expulsion of all Jews who arrived in Palestine after 1917. There may, however, be a silver lining to Mr Peres's abolition of a hasbara department from the Foreign Ministry.

The prime minister, if he is so minded, can establish such a service as a separate office under a minister attached to the Prime Minister's Office. Even now it may not be too late.